

A new methodology for informing health policy: building population health scenarios for Portugal

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Abstract

The health context is rapidly changing. As individuals are living increasingly longer, they are prone to develop health problems and live with long-term illnesses. At the same time, new technologies emerge and health systems are facing sustainability problems. Adequate policy-making, within and outside the health sector, needs to reflect on possible population health scenarios when analyzing which policies should be prioritized and adopted. There has been little research on using population health scenarios in general, and specifically for Portugal. This study proposes a new methodology for building alternative population health scenarios, being applied to Portugal.

The proposed methodology is incremental and qualitative, is based on experts' views, and makes use of an adapted morphological analysis. In a first stage, for a wide range of population health dimensions/indicators, experts are asked to explicit their world views on which is the likely evolution of those indicators and on which factors will influence that evolution (answers through a web-platform). Then causal maps will be used to model the deep causes that may influence an indicator or a set of indicators. An adapted morphological analysis will be used to obtain different combinations of plausible evolutions of population health dimensions/indicators. Finally, based on that information, qualitative scenarios will be built and discussed with experts, being key information for inform policy making.

The proposed methodology is being applied to produce population health scenarios for Portugal, identifying causes for distinct evolution patterns on population health, and enabling health policy-makers to act on factors that promote population health.

Keywords: Health policy; scenarios; policy evaluation; uncertainty; Portugal; foresight