Florianópolis city: A healthy example

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Ranked in the top five in the federal government assessment of the national health system, Florianópolis, capital of Santa Catarina state, stands out among cities because it has better access to and a higher quality of public services. This results from a 2006 policy shift related to primary health care.

Currently, about 110 networked family health teams serve 90% of the population, which the Health Department of the City of Florianópolis says is the greatest coverage among state capitals. To ensure that performance, Jorge Zepeda, Health Department manager of primary care, explains that despite advances, it was necessary to confront some problems, one of them being resistance to the program among the people. "In the primary health care model, the first step is for patients to consult with a general practitioner. But this was rejected by people familiar with the old model of health, in which they would often visit the specialist without first consulting a physician. In fact, this custom harms the person, because a specialist doctor is not always aware of the history of the patient and may recommend treatment and expenses that may not be necessary."



Photo: Divulgação SMS Florianópolis.

Despite difficulties in implementing the new primary health care model, the results are already showing up in health indicators. From 2006 to 2011, the infant mortality rate in Florianópolis for children under 1 year fell from 9.1 to 8.4 per 1,000 live births. Also, between 2008 and 2011 hospital admissions declined by about 28%. The declines are particularly noticeable in terms of diseases treated by primary care teams (hypertension, obesity, diabetes, etc.) and the increase in doctor visits by pregnant women (74% of them were seen 7 or more times). The number of dental problems also declined by 67% between 2003 and 2008, and primary care units hired 495% more medical and nursing students. "We adopted a system of teams in which about 90% of the professionals are public employees. This reduces staff turnover and gives staff more experience and knowledge of patients' history, increasing the capacity and efficiency of health care services," Zepeda said.

To sustain those services Florianópolis last year spent 21% of the city budget on health compared to the 15% mandated by law. "The funds received from the Ministry of Health and the government of Santa Catarina state are not sufficient to cover even one-third of what is spent on primary care," says Daniel Moutinho, Florianópolis director of primary care. Zepeda reports that it takes "more money to keep teams. Today, the largest share of transfers from the federal government is going to hospitals for high complexity health care, which has high political visibility and influence from the pharmaceutical industry. What little is left goes to primary care."