
CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

The “CELL” initiative as an instrument for integrated care in Limburg (Flanders): a provincial living lab approach

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Introduction: The primary care system in Flanders (Belgium) was substantially reoriented and restructured. At local level Primary Care Zones (PCZs) were installed to support better coordination and connect care and welfare organizations with local authorities. The province of Limburg counts 8 active PCZs and is one of the five provinces of Flanders. The province boasts an interesting mining history, forests and historic towns. Collaboration and exchange between primary care actors and knowledge institutions (universities of applied sciences and universities) offers opportunities to translate and implement evidence-based concepts and innovations in the sector. Vice versa, the sector's practical knowledge feeds scientific research and education in the knowledge institutions.

Description: Limburg has a well-established tradition of collaboration between the healthcare and welfare sector and the knowledge institutions (Hasselt University and University Colleges PXL and UCLL). The PCZs and knowledge institutions aim to further strengthen this existing collaboration and embed it in the Health Campus Limburg (as a tangible meeting ground for primary care in Limburg). This creates a unique partnership between practice (healthcare & welfare), knowledge (research and education) and campus development (innovation ecosystem). The initiative - called 'CELL' was launched on October 5th of 2022 in Hasselt. A charter was signed by 17 Limburg organizations. In addition to 6 PCZs, the 3 knowledge institutions and Health Campus Limburg, the 2 Limburg hospital networks (South-West and North-East Limburg), the 3 mental healthcare networks (Reling, Noolim, Ligant), the palliative care network (Pallion) and the Logo Limburg (prevention network) also joined. The 3 knowledge institutes will collaborate intensively within the CELL initiative in the coming years to strengthen primary care in Limburg. CELL aims to facilitate integrated care at a regional level through innovation processes and projects. Limburg can act as a testing ground (Living Lab) for Flanders to test, monitor and implement innovations in the fields of population management, digitization, community-oriented care, etc.

Discussion: The CELL initiative is embedded in the Hasselt University Fund and together with the partner organizations the first 2 years of funding is insured. At this point the governance structure is realized and the PCZs performed a needs assessment to establish their annual action plan. CELL will identify the main common denominators in order to accomplish joint initiatives. CELL will not operate parallel to the PZCs, but act as a supportive and academic umbrella. CELL is open to work with all organizations in- and outside the region, that share the same goals. It strives towards a good cooperation and exchange with the Flemish government and its organizations (including the Flemish Institute for Primary Care, VIVEL).

Conclusion: The interaction between the PCZs themselves and the collaboration with knowledge institutions thus contribute to the further development of high-quality integrated care and welfare and offers opportunities to translate and implement new concepts and (digital) innovations in the sector. This directly benefits citizens and patients in the province of Limburg.