
CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

How can we develop a well-supported policy plan? Towards a cocreative development of a new informal care policy plan in Flanders: process and research results.

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In Belgium, there is a growing awareness about the importance of informal carers to cover persons' care and support needs. In the last decades several efforts were made in order to support informal carers, reduce levels of burden and enhance quality of life. In 2016, Flanders launched the Flemish informal care policy plan 2016-2020, which was created to valorise and support informal carers in the Dutch speaking part of Belgium and in Brussels. This policy plan came to an end and an evaluation of its implementation was necessary to outline future policy priorities and actions.

The evaluation methodology used insights from the analytic hierarchy process and was characterised by a participatory approach. Stakeholders from different stakeholder groups (i.e., informal carers, informal care organisations, organisations for persons with care and support needs and their relatives, professional care organisations, policy makers and researchers) were involved in all steps of the research process. In collaboration with the researchers, stakeholders generated knowledge, which formed the basis for the next steps of the research process. Focus groups were held with each stakeholder group, which aimed to explore the goals of a successful Flemish informal care policy. Six goals were identified by the participants, each containing around eight preconditions to achieve the identified goal. The generated input was used in an online questionnaire to evaluate the Flemish informal care policy plan 2016-2020 and define priorities for a new informal care policy plan.

The online questionnaire gathered data of 1,045 respondents from different stakeholder groups. Although the results show that the identified needs and priorities in the Flemish informal care policy plan 2016-2020 are still prominent, there is a discrepancy between the perspective of informal carers and the perspective of health and social care professionals. Most informal carers indicate that the various priorities of a successful informal care policy were not present in the implementation of the Flemish informal care plan 2016-2020, which was not the case for health and social care professionals. Regarding the new Flemish informal care policy plan, two objectives were prioritised by most participants in the different participant profiles: 'recognising and

acknowledging informal carers' and 'supporting informal carers'. The selected goals for a new informal care policy plan as well as the selected preconditions within these goals show that the provision of care and support should be perceived as a process rather than a product. Furthermore, informal care should be approached as a matter that goes beyond care and wellbeing.

Following the evaluation study, a participatory trajectory was initiated to outline future policy priorities and actions for a new informal care policy plan. Therefore, interviews with experts and policymakers were conducted, cocreation workshops with informal care organisations were held and a validation session with broader stakeholders was conducted.

The evaluation study and participatory trajectory offered interesting insights for the creation of a sense of ownership in policy making and facilitated content development and implementation of a new informal care policy plan, taking various stakeholder perspectives into account.