



CHAPTER ONE

Overview of Portugal's Healthcare System

In this chapter, we will explore the healthcare system's history in Portugal and look at key statistics such as life expectancy. We will also take a look at the physical and human resources that make up the system.

History of the healthcare system



In 1946, Portugal enacted its first social security law. This mandated social security and sickness funds to provide health care for employed individuals and their dependents. Both employees and employers had to make compulsory contributions to finance these services.

Following the revolution in 1974, the health service was restructured, ultimately leading to the establishment of the National Health Service (Serviço Nacional de Saúde, SNS) in 1979. This SNS is now a tax-funded, universal system. Presently, the Portuguese health system comprises three interconnected and coexisting components: The universal SNS, specialized health insurance plans for particular professions or sectors (referred to as health subsystems), and voluntary private health insurance (VHI).

Since 2011, the Ministry of Health in Portugal has implemented several reforms to improve the healthcare system. These reforms include better governance and regulation, health promotion campaigns, restructuring the pharmaceutical market, and expanding palliative care and primary and hospital care. These changes have been put in place to ensure that the health system is fair, effective, and responsive to the needs of its citizens.

Is Portuguese healthcare good?

Portugal's healthcare system has consistently ranked highly in global comparisons, demonstrating the country's excellent standard of both public and private healthcare services.



World Index of Healthcare Innovation ranking

Portugal ranks 22nd in the 2022 World Index of Healthcare Innovation.¹ The World Index of Healthcare Innovation ranks countries' healthcare systems based on quality, choice, science and technology, and fiscal sustainability. Portugal was in the top ten in healthcare quality due to its patient-centered care and health outcomes.²



World Health Organisation ranking

The World Health Organisation (WHO) ranked the Portuguese healthcare system 12th in its ranking of world healthcare systems. In 2019, the WHO created the World Health Report, using factors such as life expectancy, treatment of illnesses, and efficiency in the healthcare system. Portugal was awarded 12th place, reflecting its impressive healthcare system.



Healthiest Places to Live Index

Money.co.uk, a British website that publishes an annual "Healthiest Places to Live Index," ranked Lisbon as the 4th healthiest city to live in 2022, with Porto coming in at 14th place.

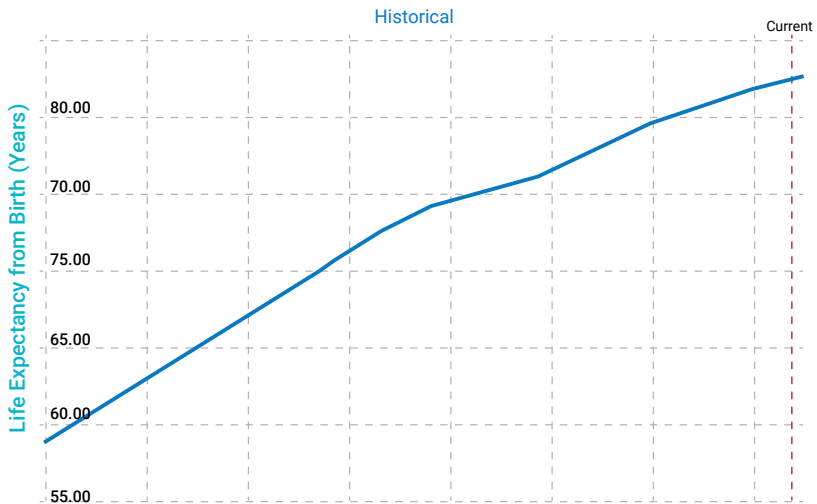
The index considers various factors, including average life expectancy, air pollution, obesity rates, and hours of sunlight. The 2022 edition of the index included new metrics such as medical care and the number of nurses, psychiatrists, social workers, and psycholo-

gists per 100,000 inhabitants in each country. The study also considered the prevalence of mental health disorders, substance use, and overall health expenditure.

Life expectancy in Portugal

Two overall health indicators in a country are life expectancy and infant mortality. Portugal's average life expectancy at birth is now 82.65 years, higher than the European Union average of 80.1 years.³ There is an upward trend in life expectancy every year. In 2000, for example, the life expectancy was 76.63 years, reflecting the continuous improvement in healthcare in the country.⁴

Graph of life expectancy in Portugal



Source: www.macrotrends.net

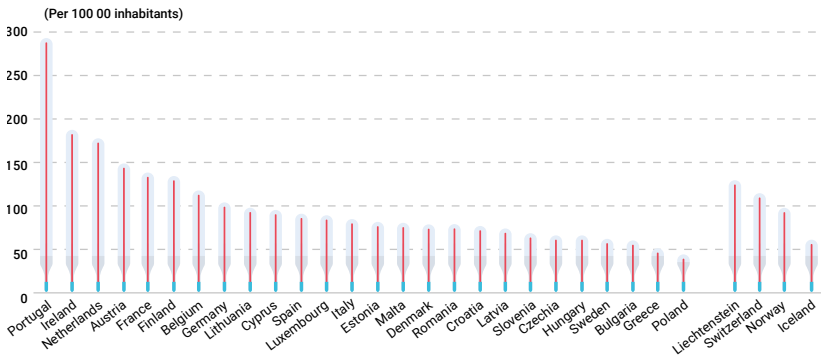
Similarly, there is a downward trend in infant mortality in Portugal. In 2023, the infant mortality rate for Portugal is 2.331 deaths per 1000 live births, a 5.13 percent decline from 2022.⁵

Physical and human resources

Portugal's current population in 2023 is 10,247,605 people.⁶ As of 2021, an estimated 11 percent of the country's GDP is being used to fund the healthcare system.⁷ Portugal has 241 hospitals in total with an estimated overall capacity of over 36,000 beds.⁸

According to data from 2020, Portugal has the largest number of general medical practitioners per 100,000 people in the European Union.

Number of generalist medical practitioners in 2020



Greece and Portugal: Generalist medical practitioners licensed to practice. Slovakia: data not available. Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, Sweden, Iceland: data refer to 2019 instead of 2020. Finland: data refer to 2018 instead of 2020. Luxembourg and Poland: data refer to 2017 instead of 2020.

Source: www.who.int

An estimated 26 percent of the population has a second (or more) layer of health insurance coverage through voluntary health insurance (VHI) or health subsystems for specific sectors or occupations.

Portugal's pharmacies are pretty evenly distributed throughout the country, and the number of pharmacists has been on the rise for the last 15 years.⁹ However, there are fewer pharmacists in Portugal compared to countries like Spain or the United Kingdom. Similarly, Portugal faces a challenge in distributing its health workers evenly across the population - most of them are located in big cities and coastal areas, which leaves people in inland areas under-served.