

The Swiss Health System: Key Characteristics and Policy Challenges

Facilitators

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Description

The Swiss health system is known for its universal coverage and high-quality services, but also for its high healthcare costs and for a financing mix that challenge the principle of affordable care for all. The course will explore and discuss key characteristics and policy challenges of the Swiss health system and examine the factors that have contributed to the system's success and performance, as well as the challenges it faces in ensuring high-quality, affordable health care for all. The target groups are participants with contextual knowledge on Switzerland but aiming to get a comprehensive understanding of the Swiss health system and its characteristics.

The Swiss health system has a complex governance that involves various stakeholders, including the federal government, cantons, health insurers, healthcare providers and many other actors such as patient and professional associations, or the pharmaceutical industry. We thus will begin the course by reviewing the history of the Swiss health system, including the development of its universal coverage model inspired by the managed competition idea of Alan Enthoven. The structure of the Swiss health system is to be examined emphasizing its decentralized organization based on federalism and direct democracy. We will provide an overview on key actors for health service delivery and public health programs, and emphasis on how the federal government and cantons set the framework for health policy development and how cantons and municipalities are responsible for implementing it.

Next, we will examine how Switzerland performs in respect to the key dimensions: equity, efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness by comparing it with neighboring countries. This is to allow for discussing in more detail the policy challenges facing the Swiss Health System.

The course will include a focus on health financing, and scrutinize the role of health insurance, cantons and households. In complement, the package of services

covered by mandatory health insurance is presented as well as the role of Swissmedic and how new health technologies and drugs are being approved and reimbursed.

The role of different healthcare providers is being introduced emphasizing health workforce issues as well as integrated care, patient care and patient pathways. This in a context where patients have a high level of autonomy in choosing healthcare providers with typically short waiting times. Incentive and constraints for coordinated care between health professionals will be discussed.

We will further deal with the challenges related to public health and health equity and examine public health programs at the federal or cantonal level, such as disease surveillance and control, health promotion campaigns, vaccination programs, community-based health promotion and school-based health programs, trying to assess their impact on the health of the population.

By the end of the course, students will have a comprehensive understanding of the Swiss health system, its performance and policy dynamics. They will also be equipped with the knowledge and skills to review policy options.

Objectives

Upon completing the course, students will be able to

- Have acquainted the performance framework of health systems and main conceptual elements of this framework and apply the performance framework to current health policy issues in Switzerland with emphasis on equity, efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness
- Understand the governance (including legal basis) and organization of the Swiss health system thereby be aware of the political economy of health system reforms (power relations, interests etc.)
- Explain the role of public programs and public health strategies
- Describe financing and payment of health services (including health insurance system), health technology assessment, health workforce development and health information systems
- Reflect and analyze through a case study on a concrete Swiss health policy and reform topic in the light of international experiences.

Dates

9 - 13 March 2026

Eligibility

SSPH+ PhD and MD students, PhD students in health sciences, public health, economics, nursing sciences and social sciences, medical doctors, postdocs or young scientists interested in the Swiss health system

Course Structure

Prior to the course module, participants have to reflect, read and prepare a specific case study aligned to the course content and referring to the Swiss health system. The course organisers will for the preparatory period propose teams of 3 to 5 students with overall around four to five case studies. The case studies will focus on current Swiss policy and reform issues, stakeholder positions to the case and relate them to the broader, international context and experiences of other countries.

The course will then consist of:

- Introductory lectures on the performance framework for health systems (with reference to equity, efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness) and health systems thinking
- Presentation on the organisation of the Swiss health system (main actors), its legal basis, the political economy of the Swiss health system
- Public health strategies and programs in Switzerland
- Health financing, payment and insurance system as well as the role of health technology assessment
- Health workforce issues
- Integrated coordinated care models (or new models of care), including patient care and patient pathways
- Interactive discussions/exchanges in plenary
- A group work / case study to be finalised in a team on day four and to be presented/discussed to a fictive stakeholder panel on the last day of the course.

After the course week the participants have to work on and finalise their respective case study thereby referring stakeholder perspectives, through a short summary note of 5 to 10 pages.

Assessment

Pro-active participation, summary note of group work

Credits

2 ECTS

- Pre-course reading including initial reading of a case study (to be noted that the case study will be given to course participants ahead of the course) – 10 hours
- Course attendance/participation – 32 hours
- Group work during the course – 8 hours
- Short summary note on the group work after course – 10 hours

(1 ECTS corresponds to appr. 25-30 hours workload)

Location

Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute (Swiss TPH), Allschwil/Basel, seminar room 6

Course Fees

	2 ECTS
SSPH+ IGC PhD Students	30 CHF
SSPH+ IGC MD Students	30 CHF
External PhD students, external MD Students and Swiss Public Health Doctors in training	600 CHF
Others	1'600 CHF

Registration

<https://www.conftool.com/ssph-phd-courses2026/>

Deadline for Registration

9 February 2026