


## CARE NETWORKS: THE IMPORTANCE OF INTEGRATING HEALTH SERVICES IN COLLECTIVE HEALTH

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**Amanda Calzi Roldi<sup>1</sup>, Viviane Maia Santos<sup>2</sup>, Hugo Emanuel Santos Pimenta<sup>3</sup>,  
Guilherme Gonçalves da Silva<sup>4</sup>, Luana da Silva Ferreira<sup>5</sup>, Helison de Oliveira  
Carvalho<sup>6</sup>, Tarciso Arcela Costa Freire<sup>7</sup>, Kariny Alves Barboza<sup>8</sup>, Lorena dos Santos  
Medrado<sup>9</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Master's student in Public Policy and Local Development  
Emescam

E-mail: roldiamanda@hotmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-9894-0939>

LATTES: <https://lattes.cnpq.br/0724386660498344>

<sup>2</sup> Nurse and Master in Primary Health Care

Unimontes Nursing Department

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2549-4612>

LATTES: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/7770981479414493>

<sup>3</sup> Stoma Therapist Nurse

Municipal Health Department of Montes Claros- MG

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-6748-7815>

LATTES: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/5447566502953500>

<sup>4</sup> Dental Surgeon and Master's Student in Primary Health Care

State University of Montes Claros - Unimontes

E-mail: guilherme.goncalves91@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6050-7968>

<sup>5</sup> Cardiology Resident Nurse

Evangelical Hospital of Cachoeiro de Itapemirim

E-mail: luanamardegani@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1678-815X/>

LATTES: <https://lattes.cnpq.br/3239130873031267>

<sup>6</sup> Pharmacist

Federal University of Amapá - UNIFAP

E-mail: Helison\_farma@hotmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8472-1993>

LATTES: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/7205032999843643>

<sup>7</sup> Doctor Specialized in Family and Community Medicine

SBMFC

Email: tarciso.freire@hotmail.com

LATTES: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/7892446274685154>

<sup>8</sup> Nurse and Master in Health, Environment Society

Federal University of the Jequitinhonha and Mucuri Valleys - UFVJM

E-mail: karinyalves23@yahoo.com.br

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4806-1550>

LATTES: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/7494104478926443>

<sup>9</sup> Nurse

São Lucas University Center

E-mail: loris.medrado@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-0368-1428>

LATTES: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/7983715074528505>

and Caroline Maria Silva Lima<sup>10</sup>

## ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the recent literature on the importance of integrated care networks and the integration of health services for collective health. The problem identified is the fragmentation of services, which compromises the quality and continuity of care, especially for patients with complex needs. The objective of this research is to analyze models of service integration, as well as the benefits and challenges observed in different contexts. The methodology consists of an exploratory and descriptive review of studies published in the PubMed, Scopus, and SciELO databases. The results show that integrated networks promote advances in the accessibility and quality of care, standing out in emergency settings and in the management of chronic diseases. Experiences from countries such as Singapore and Australia reveal that adapting models to local realities is crucial for success. It is concluded that the effective implementation of care networks requires flexibility, continuous planning and involvement of professionals and managers, standing out as a promising approach for the promotion of a more equitable and efficient health system.

**Keywords:** Care Networks. Service Integration. Collective Health. Equity. Continuity of Care.

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<sup>10</sup> Nurse Specialist in Family Health Residency  
State University of Montes Claros - Unimontes  
E-mail: carolinemariasilvalima703@gmail.com  
LATTES: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/5006611411441642>

## INTRODUCTION

The integration of health services has been highlighted as an essential strategy to promote more coordinated, efficient and accessible health systems. Care networks, designed to connect different levels of care, help overcome fragmentation and improve continuity of care, especially in public health contexts (GONIEWICZ et al., 2021). These networks are especially important in times of public health crises and in the treatment of chronic diseases, as they promote a model of care that goes beyond punctual and isolated care, offering a more holistic response adapted to the needs of patients (RAMAGEM et al., 2021).

Organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) emphasize the importance of integrated networks to expand access and equity in health services, considering them a mechanism to address structural and operational challenges that affect the quality of care (FLEURY; MERCIER, 2020). In countries with fragmented health systems, the implementation of these networks has been pointed out as a crucial measure to expand quality and accessibility, promoting collective health and ensuring comprehensive care for the population (NURJONO et al., 2018).

Models such as the Integrated Health Service Delivery Networks (IHSDN) promoted by PAHO, according to Ramagem et al. (2021), demonstrate how a structured approach is capable of improving access and equity in health care. Heyeres et al. (2018) explore that the complexity of this integration requires adaptation of models according to local particularities, suggesting that collaboration between the public and private sectors is an essential factor for the success of care networks.

Other international experiences reinforce the importance of flexible and adaptive networks. For example, in Australia, the creation of Primary Health Networks (PHNs) has made it possible to reduce the fragmentation of health services, improving coordination between primary care and public health (BOOTH et al., 2021). In Singapore, the Regional Health System (RHS) offers another integrated care model that adapts its operations according to the demands of the population, demonstrating how flexibly structured networks can be effective in different contexts (NURJONO et al., 2018). These models show that the integration of health services should be seen as an essential approach for the construction of a more equitable and efficient collective health.

The objective of this study is to review the recent literature on the integration of health services in care networks, analyzing the main models, challenges, and benefits

observed. The analysis of the studies allows us to understand how these networks can transform public health, promoting equity, efficiency, and continuity in care, in addition to highlighting the role of public policies adapted to local realities and the epidemiological profile of the populations served.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This literature review follows an exploratory and descriptive approach, seeking to identify and analyze the most recent studies on care networks and the integration of health services. The databases consulted include PubMed, Scopus, and SciELO, focusing on articles with an emphasis on empirical studies and critical reviews that address integration models, challenges, and benefits of care networks in varied contexts.

The inclusion criteria for the reviewed studies were: (1) research published in the last 10 years, (2) studies that discuss the implementation and evaluation of care networks in public health, (3) articles focusing on access outcomes, equity, and continuity of care. Articles that deal with exclusively private health systems or with a restricted focus on a specialty that does not interact with public health were excluded.

The analysis of the collected data consisted of the synthesis of the findings and the identification of the main themes addressed by the literature, such as benefits, limitations, and implementation strategies. The organization of the results was structured to present a comparative view of the models of integrated networks and to discuss the relevance of adapting public policies to contexts of different epidemiological and structural realities.

## **RESULTS**

The results of the review indicate that integrated care networks promote significant advances in the quality, accessibility, and continuity of health services, standing out for their effectiveness in populations with complex needs, such as the elderly and patients with multiple comorbidities. Fleury and Mercier (2020) emphasize that, in the field of mental health, the integration of local networks resulted in a significant reduction in the fragmentation of services, providing more coordinated care and reflecting in greater satisfaction and better prognosis for patients.

## DISCUSSION

In emergency contexts, as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the research by Goniewicz et al. (2021) evidences that integration was essential for an agile response to public health demands, ensuring that patients with multiple needs received continuous care. The European experience has shown that the adaptability of integrated networks, enabling rapid reorientations in health services, was fundamental for effective crisis management.

In Latin America, the implementation of the Integrated Health Service Delivery Networks (IHSDN), promoted by PAHO, has proven to be efficient in expanding access and equity in health care. Ramagem et al. (2021) reinforce that these networks, by fostering collaboration between different levels of care, reduced barriers to access and facilitated the management of chronic diseases. The study by Booth et al. (2021) on the Australian experience with Primary Health Networks (PHNs) indicates that coordination between public health and primary care not only reduces duplication of services and costs, but also provides care that is more focused on the needs of patients, promoting more personalized and integrated care.

On the other hand, the implementation of care networks faces significant challenges, such as the need to adapt integration models to local particularities and the resistance of some professionals and managers to adopt a more collaborative approach (Heyeres et al., 2018). The experience of Singapore, studied by Nurjono et al. (2018), highlights the importance of flexibility and adaptability in the development of integrated networks, suggesting that effective implementation requires continuous planning and the active involvement of local actors, so that services can respond dynamically to the needs of the population.

## CONCLUSION

The literature review reveals that integrated care networks are essential in improving public health, promoting more equitable access, better coordination and greater continuity of health services. The studies analyzed indicate that integration between levels of care and collaboration between different sectors are essential to respond to complex public health challenges, including the management of chronic diseases and rapid adaptation in emergency situations.

However, the effective implementation of care networks requires the adaptation of integration models to local particularities and a continuous commitment on the part of health

professionals and managers to consolidate collaborative practices. The experiences of countries such as Australia and Singapore exemplify that well-structured care networks, which adjust according to the demands and needs of patients, are more effective in providing holistic and quality care. Thus, it is concluded that integrated care networks represent a promising approach to strengthen health systems and promote collective health in a sustainable and inclusive way.

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