Agency for Health Quality and Assessment of Catalonia (AQuAS)

AQuAS is a public entity of the Catalan Health Ministry with more than 20 years of history.

AQuAS’s role is to generate scientific and relevant knowledge for all the agents of the Catalan Health System to inform decision-making processes to contribute to the improvement of its quality, safety and sustainability.

AQuAS’s vision is becoming an evaluation benchmark in Catalonia, Spain and internationally.
AQuAS strategic lines

To achieve its aims AQuAS focuses on three main strategic lines:

Observatory, Assessment and Innovation, using information and communication technologies (ICT) as tools.

1. **Observatory**

Offering information and knowledge to health managers, physicians and nurses, researchers, and citizens in order to improve the understanding of the health care sector and to facilitate decision-making and benchmarking.

This task is carried out by the Catalan Health System Observatory, which works under the principles of accountability and transparency.

2. **Assessment**

Evaluating structures, processes and outcomes related to health care and publicly funded research carried out by the different agents of the Catalan Health System.

Evaluation activities are deployed in four specific areas:

- **eHealth evaluation and health technology assessment** based on scientific knowledge to inform decision-making on aspects such as efficacy, safety, effectiveness and efficiency.

- **Quality assessment** to improve health care quality by analysing medical practice variations, identifying best practices and proposing indicators of structure, process and outcomes.

- **Social impact research assessment** going beyond bibliometric analysis and looking for the impact of biomedical research on knowledge creation, health status and economic growth.

- **Drugs and pharmacy evaluation** through the Drug Innovation & Support Programme (PISAM) to assess the efficacy, safety and effectiveness as well as the therapeutic impact of drugs.
Innovation

- Promoting innovation by applying new technologies and procedures on contracts covering supplies and services purchased by the public sector through public procurement of innovation or pre-commercial procurement (PCP).
- Fostering participation in International projects on health innovations.

Health ICT Services Centre

Previous strategic lines are supported by the Health ICT Services Centre. Its aims to guarantee the performance of main health ICT infrastructures as well as the availability and safety of information for the health care system.

Catalan health electronic records, electronic prescription, the Plan for digitizing medical imaging, Personal Health Channel and the Telestroke network (Teleictus) are some of the most relevant projects which are managed from the Health ICT Center of Services.

Main AQuAS projects and products

AQuAS wants to create more value for the Catalan Health System.

To achieve this goal, several projects have been prioritised in 2014 as follows:

1. **Results Centre**

   The Results Centre of the Catalan Health System Observatory annually provides reports on statistics and indicators of public health care centres aimed at boosting and improving benchmarking and decision-making processes.

   Moreover, the Results Centre works to ensure that data can be easily consulted and accessed by citizens in raw format, according to international open data policies.

   [http://observatorisalut.gencat.cat](http://observatorisalut.gencat.cat)

2. **Atlas of Medical Practice Variations**

   This project aims to analyse the medical practice variations of public health care centres indicators at hospital and outpatient level in order to identify best practices that could be applied to other centers or even to the entire Health System.

   Thrombolytic therapy in stroke and hip and knee prostheses have been the last Atlas published.

3. **Essencial “adding value to clinical practice”**

   A project that identifies ineffective, unsafe or inappropriate clinical interventions for promoting recommendations intended to discourage the routine or total use of such interventions.

   [http://essencialsalut.gencat.cat](http://essencialsalut.gencat.cat)
Essential recommendations:
- are based on scientific evidence and consensus with scientific societies.
- encourage the participation and involvement of health professionals by proposing new recommendations.
- are publicly searchable through a database and a directory.
- are actively communicated in a clear way by different channels to targeted audiences.
- are impact assessed to ascertain to what extent they are known and adopted by health care professionals.

**Observatory of Innovation in Healthcare Management in Catalonia**

This Observatory is also part of the Catalan Health System Observatory. Its main role is collecting, validating and disseminating the knowledge created by health management innovative experiences carried out mainly within the Health System.

New methodologies are being developed to assess the impact of innovative and eHealth initiatives, as well as their capacity to be extended to other centers.

The Observatory’s internationalisation is another relevant objective to share best practices over the world. A recent agreement with the Boston Center for Integration of Medicine and Innovative Technology (CIMIT) is a good sample of this policy.

**Drug Innovation & Support Programme (PISAM)**

This AQuAS’ programme was commissioned by the Catalan Health Service - a public and universal health insurer - to provide information and services to improve drugs utilization & safety as well as the quality of pharmaceutical prescription care.

To achieve its goals, PISAM works in drugs and pharmaceutical areas such as:
- writing drug evaluation reports for primary care and hospital drugs
- designing ICT based support tools for decision-making (safety filters for electronic prescription)
- standardizing drugs and health care indicators (Quality Index of Drugs Prescription)
- implementing drug information systems (i.e. the future Prescription Drugs Observatory)
AQuAS promotes health sciences research to respond to the population’s and the Health System’s knowledge needs.

The ISOR group is the AQuAS research group responsible for this area and has worked in multiple research impact assessment projects. The ISOR group also develops new methods of prioritisation, assessment, follow-up and accountability of social impact in health sciences research. Its ultimate goal is to consolidate research impact assessment as a tool for maximising the social benefits from funded research.

In addition to the managing of public health research calls (i.e. La Marató de TV3, a telethon of the public TV channel), the ISOR group works on other relevant lines in this field such as the creation of information systems on health research in Catalonia or the evaluation of the social impact of 21 years of annual calls for research of La Marató de TV3.

The AQuAS is also a foundational member of the International School on Research Impact Assessment (ISRIA). Two issues of the ISRIA have been held since 2013 in Barcelona and the Canadian city of Banff respectively.

Visc+ intends to increase the value of the data and information available at the Catalan Health System by linking data coming from multiple sources and organisations and enabling the re-utilisation of such data by all the agents of the health care system.

Inputs generated by this project are expected to provide new data and information for research and evaluation.

Nowadays 100% of the hospitals and primare health care centers of the public network are connected to the Catalan health electronic record. All the Catalan citizens older than 16 can online consult their personal health data.
International projects on evaluation & innovation

According to its vision, AQuAS aims to become an international benchmark at Catalonia, Spain and internationally.

International cooperation and collaboration means working locally and globally through added value scientific and technological networks which allow us to increase talent and degree of excellence.

As a result, AQuAS is a member of organizations such as the International Network of Agencies of Health Technology Assessment (INAHTA), Health Technology Assessment International (HTAi), Guidelines International Network (G-I-N) and the EUnetHTA (European Network of Agencies of Health Technology Assessment).

Some of AQuAS most highlighted international projects

- **EPSOS -European Patients Smart Open Services** - the most important project undertaken by the European Union on eHealth that aims to design, build and evaluate a service infrastructure that demonstrates cross-border interoperability between electronic health record systems in Europe.
- **United4Health (U4H)** aims to exploit and further deploy innovative telemedicine services implemented and trialed under the previous **Renewing Health** project. All service solutions adopt a patient-centred approach and involve telemonitoring and treatment of chronic patients with diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or cardiovascular disease.
- **Euro-BioImaging** is a pan-European infrastructure project whose mission is to build a distributed imaging infrastructure across Europe that will provide open access to innovative biological and medical imaging technologies for European researchers.
- **DECIPHER PCP** creates a mobile health care solution. It aims to develop a mobile solution which enables secure cross-border access to existing patient healthcare portals.
- **DAYSafe** is to improve patient safety and quality of hospital care through the promotion of day safe best practices and standards.
- **VPH-Share collaborative data & models** develops and deploys the VPH infostructure, the computing infrastructure through which the VPH community will be able to store, share, reuse and integrate data, information, knowledge and wisdom on the physiopathology of the human body.
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