

Health Care in Spain: Current Status and Future Directions

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This article highlights the health care situation in Spain, which is mostly public and free for all citizens. The National Health System (NHS) is the entity that provides benefits and health services in Spain, which, according to the law, are the responsibilities of the public authorities.

Spain is located in the southwest of Europe and the north of Africa. It consists of 2 archipelagos (the Canary Islands in the Atlantic Ocean and the Balearic Islands in the Mediterranean Sea), and 2 autonomous cities (Ceuta and Melilla) in the north of Africa, apart from several smaller islands in this area and others near the peninsula.

It covers an area of 505,955 km², and is the fourth largest country on the European continent, after Russia, Ukraine, and France.¹

The mainland shares land borders with France and Andorra to the north, Portugal to the west, and the British territory of Gibraltar to the south. In its African territories, it shares land and sea borders with Morocco (see Figure 1). Spain's capital is Madrid.

The estimated population of Spain in 2015 was 46.4 million with an average age of 41.9 years.² Life expectancy at birth is 82.4 years (total population), which places it fifth in longevity among the European countries after France, Switzerland, Iceland, and Italy.³

The country has been a member of the European Union since January 1, 1986.

The governance structure is a parliamentary monarchy that upholds a social and democratic state of law. Spain is currently a state of autonomies (formally, a unitary country); that is, it works as a decentralized federation of autonomous communities, each of them with different levels of self-government.

Spain is the ninth country in the world that has more immigrants in absolute numbers, behind countries like the United States, Russia, Germany, France, Canada, and the United Kingdom.⁴ Most immigrants arriving in Spain come from Latin America (36.21%), followed by Western Europe (21.06%),

Eastern Europe (17.75%), and the Maghreb (14.76%). Castilian, or Spanish, is the official language throughout the country.

The World Bank classifies Spain's income group as upper-middle class.⁵ The average gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was €23,290 in 2015 (see Figure 2). Its GDP composition is primarily in the service sector (74.9%), followed by industry and energy (17.1%), construction (5.5%), and agriculture and fisheries (2.5%).

Spain is part of the European Region of the World Health Organization, and as such, provides information to the World Health Organization on the health status of the country. Based on this reporting, the percentage of Spaniards who use health care is 72%.⁶

Health Care

Health care is coordinated jointly by the central government, through the Ministry of Health, and the health services of each of the autonomous communities.

The NHS aims primarily to ensure and enable health public funding, universality, equality in access, and quality and safety of services. The Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality develops government policy in health, planning, health care, and consumer goods, as well as exercising the powers of the central government to ensure citizens the right to health protection.

Public health expenditure in Spain decreased by 425.4 million in 2014 (0.58%) with public expenditure on health of €1458 per capita.⁷ The percentage of GDP spent on public health is 6.0% and on private health is 2.4%.⁸ Spending on services of curative care and rehabilitation amounted to €52,799 million.

The NHS has 3023 health centers and 10,081 primary care clinics. It has a network of 453 hospitals of which 325 are public. In the public hospital network there are 16,419 outpatient beds available (35.2 beds per 100.00 inhabitants). This is a resource that is increasing in line with increased demand for outpatient care.⁸

In Spain there are hospitals, primary care centers, specialty centers, and elderly residences, both in the public and private



Figure 1. Map of Spain. Source: Instituto Nacional Geográfico. (<http://www.ign.es/ign/layout/ignane.do>)

sectors, that have been accredited by the Joint Commission and the Foundation for International Accreditation and Development Assistance.^{9,10} The Foundation for Accreditation and Healthcare Development, a partner of the Joint Commission International, is currently working to introduce certification programs on pathologies of stroke care and care programs for diabetes.

In Spain, 60% of deaths are caused by cancer, heart disease, cerebrovascular disease, chronic diseases of the lower respiratory tract, and diabetes (see Figure 3).^{8,11}

In the context of the European Union, Spain’s situation is remarkable in terms of life expectancy and clinical outcomes. The perceived health status by Spaniards is generally positive. Chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol,

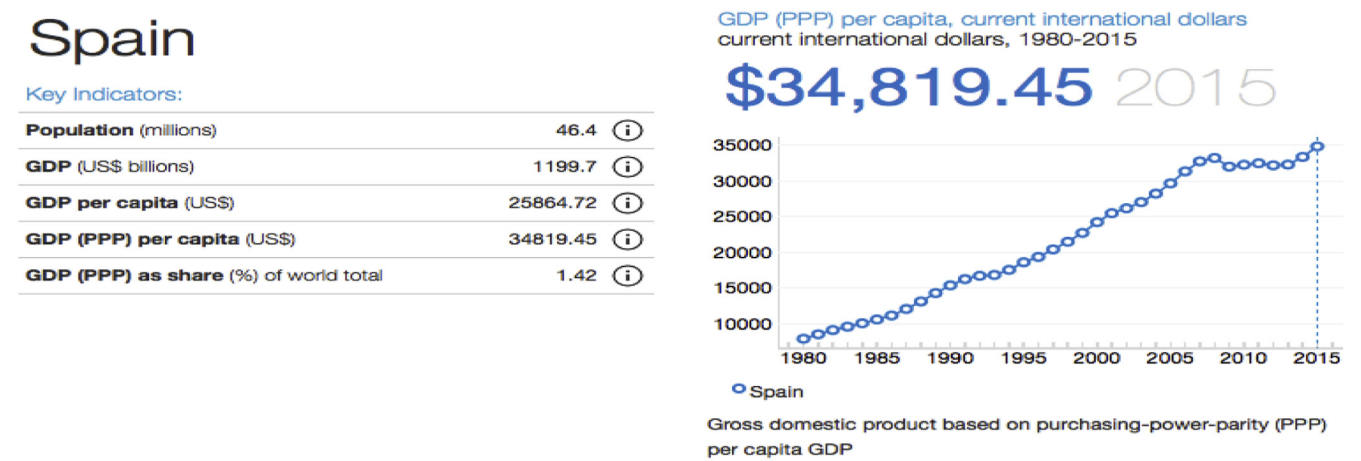


Figure 2. Key indicators. GDP = Gross domestic product; PPP = Positioning power parity.

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