

Introductory Speech NASHKO Conference:

Stakeholder Alignment in Healthcare

Date: September 1st, 2023

Honored Guests,

Esteemed Panelists,

and Distinguished Colleagues,

Good evening. For those who may not be familiar with me, my name is Raul Henriquez, and I am honored to stand before you today as the Director and Secretary General of the Social Economic Council of Curaçao, commonly known as the SER.

Usually, I would address such a distinguished audience on our beautiful island in our native language Papiamentu or in Dutch. However, out of

consideration for our non-Papiamentu or Dutch-speaking experts here, I will continue in English to ensure everyone's understanding.

The Social Economic Council, the SER, serves as a permanent advisory and consultative body, bringing together employers, employees, and independent experts. Our mission is rooted in promoting social prosperity by seeking mutual consensus on pressing social and economic issues relevant to Curaçao. The SER not only examines national concerns but also pays attention to international developments in these domains. Legislatively grounded, the Council advises both the Government and the Parliament of Curaçao on socio-economic matters and proposed legislation. The topic of this conference, stakeholder alignment, is not merely theoretical; it is a socio-economic imperative.

Esteemed audience,

[The Need for Authentic Consultation]

As healthcare becomes increasingly complex, with rapid technological advancements and multifaceted societal needs, the importance of cohesive stakeholder collaboration cannot be overstated. In a world drowning in information but lacking wisdom, it is our responsibility to apply scholarly rigor to practical applications for societal progress.

At this intellectual crossroads, the topic of Stakeholder Alignment in Healthcare goes beyond academic discourse; it becomes an urgent socio-economic necessity. As we navigate an increasingly intricate healthcare ecosystem, filled with rapid technological innovations and evolving societal expectations, the requirement for harmonious and efficient stakeholder alignment becomes ever more compelling.

In an era where data abounds but actionable insight is scarce, the drive to combine academic rigor with practical governance is not a luxury but a societal mandate. We stand at the intersection where rigorous scholarship must meet socio-economic imperatives to cultivate an integrated, equitable, and sustainable healthcare landscape.

I believe that the insights and discussions here today will serve as catalysts for invigorating both thought and action, promoting advancements in healthcare governance that are not only empirically robust but also ethically and economically sustainable.

[The Importance of Authentic Consultation]

In our advisory role, the SER has heard on multiple occasions that various stakeholders feel inadequately consulted when shaping cost-saving strategies and

systemic reforms. While information dissemination has occurred, it often lacked dynamic interaction and was one-sided. This trend must be promptly reversed. The healthcare policy framework must be a collective effort, realized through a diversity of insights and expertise.

The importance of a consultative process in healthcare policy and legislation cannot be overstated. Such a process contributes to balanced and inclusive policy measures, more effective policies, policy acceptance, and increased trust between government, the healthcare sector, and citizens. It also enables us to develop innovative approaches and solutions that might otherwise be overlooked.

[The Imperative of Governing Bodies]

Honored Guests,

As we navigate the intricate landscape of healthcare regulation and governance through multi-stakeholder engagement, it is crucial not to overlook the pivotal role of the Council for Public Health (Raad voor de Volksgezondheid) in Curaçao. Defined by explicit legislative framework, the Council's mandate encompasses responsibilities crucial for the socio-economic well-being of our society.

The Social Economic Council has been honored to engage in discussions with a diverse range of stakeholders on this pivotal issue. A resounding consensus has emerged, emphatically endorsing the urgent need to reactivate the Council for Public Health. The Council bears the responsibility of advising the Minister of Health, Environment and Nature, either proactively or upon solicitation, on:

- The structural design, operationalization, quality, and efficacy of healthcare systems.

- The implementation of existing legal frameworks governing public health.
- All other topics deemed fundamental to the health of the public.

Moreover, the Council aims to cultivate collaborative efforts among:

- Providers of healthcare services.
- Interfaces between healthcare providers and patients.
- Relationships between healthcare providers and insurance entities.
- Engagements between healthcare providers and government agencies focused on public health.

The Minister is required to notify the Council for Public Health about any intentions to enact significant measures that would affect public health and can seek counsel on forthcoming legislation and regulation in this domain.

The Council is expected to have a diverse composition, capped at an uneven number of members. This composition should include delegates from healthcare providers, insurance entities, and patient advocacy groups. An independent, expert chairperson should lead the Council, supported by a dedicated and knowledgeable secretarial team.

The revitalization of this Council goes beyond administrative formalities; it signifies a substantive step towards strengthening our healthcare infrastructure through informed, unbiased advice and the fostering of a multi-stakeholder collaborative environment.

[Empirical Foundations for Reactivation]

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Consultations conducted by the Social Economic Council have reaffirmed both the constitutional and legislative foundations of the Council for Public Health, highlighting its immediate relevance. Healthcare remains a dynamic field, influenced, as stated earlier, by rapidly evolving technologies, therapeutic paradigms, and shifting patient expectations. A consultative body featuring an extensive cross-section of healthcare stakeholders offers a disciplined, scholarly, and democratically legitimate mechanism for policy formulation and implementation.

[Academic Rigor and Data-Driven Analysis]

The Council's emphasis on data-driven methodologies would considerably enhance the scientific rigor integral to policy development. This approach encompasses diverse facets such as epidemiological patterns, disparities in healthcare accessibility, and economic constructs for healthcare funding. The

resulting synergy with existing governance mechanisms will yield comprehensive, balanced healthcare stewardship.

[Engagement of Diverse Stakeholders]

The Council for Public Health stands as a model of democratic governance by incorporating a multiplicity of stakeholders, capturing the rich complexity and nuanced dimensions of healthcare challenges in Curaçao. This inclusive paradigm amplifies the Council's credibility and, simultaneously, the dependability and societal acceptance of its recommendations.

In summary, the reactivation of the Council for Public Health represents a monumental advancement in the maturation of healthcare governance in Curaçao. It promises a future where our healthcare policies are

not merely reactive but proactively tailored, cognizant of expansive societal requirements, and anchored in empirical evidence and academic scrupulousness.

[Health Authority of Curacao]

Esteemed Colleagues and Distinguished Attendees,

As has been put forward previously, also by the other speakers, we gather today to explore a matter of profound societal significance. As SER we consider, in this regard, of extreme importance the establishment and operationalization of a Health Authority of Curaçao (Zorgautoriteit in Dutch), hereafter referred to as the CZa. The roots of this regulatory entity can be traced back to the government's decree of December 14, 2011, and a subsequent decision by the Council of Ministers on December 5, 2012, which

sought to merge the jurisdiction of the Health Authority with the Bureau of Telecommunications and Post (BT&P), a regulatory body overseeing various sectorial spheres, including telecommunications, utilities, and postal services.

While the integration under BT&P has already been decided upon, it is essential to emphasize the vital necessity of involving various stakeholders in this decision-making process. The consolidation of a regulatory framework governing diverse sectors undoubtedly warrants an inclusive and consultative approach to ensure that resulting policies resonate with the complex realities of the healthcare ecosystem.

Despite these initial policy formulations outlined in the Explanatory Memorandum to the 2012 National Ordinance on Basic Health Insurance, the formal institutionalization of the CZA remains, disconcertingly, incomplete. The need for swift legislative action

cannot be understated. The justification for the CZA rests on its potential to complement the existing quality governance mechanisms established by the Inspectorate for Public Health. Its core function is to navigate tariff landscapes, optimizing market efficiencies within the healthcare ecosystem.

Soliciting specialized input from analogous regulatory bodies, notably the Netherlands Healthcare Authority (NZa), could offer valuable analytical insights. This is especially pertinent when considering the possible aggregation of vulnerable populations under a monolithic health insurance apparatus, which could foster economies of scale and reduce bureaucratic redundancies.

When contemplating the establishment of the Health Authority, the CZA, within the unique socio-political context of Curaçao, it becomes increasingly crucial to conduct an academically rigorous, methodologically

sound, and ideologically neutral evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of its establishment.

[Advantages and disadvantages of the establishment of the Health Authority of Curaçao (CZa)]

If we look at the Advantages:

- Market Equilibrium:

Tariff oversight could foster a balanced market mechanism designed for fairness and efficiency.

- Quality Oversight:

The CZa could work collaboratively with existing regulatory agencies, strengthening healthcare governance.

- Epistemic Trust:

Monitoring crucial performance indicators and actuarial estimates could cultivate increased trust in the healthcare system.

- Accessibility & Cost Efficiency:

Through well-considered policy interventions, the CZA has the potential to enhance both the affordability and accessibility of healthcare services.

- Empirical Governance:

A data-driven approach could lead to effective policy optimization.

Like everything, a CZA can also have disadvantages:

- Bureaucratic Redundancy:

The introduction of an additional administrative layer may exacerbate systemic inefficiencies.

- Contingent Risks:

Historical precedents demonstrate the complexities and uncertainties that can challenge the establishment of such regulatory bodies.

- Jurisdictional Ambiguities:

Overlapping regulatory scopes could lead to inter-agency conflicts.

- Political Contingencies:

The intersection of political and economic forces may compromise the autonomy and impartiality of the CZa.

- Demographic Considerations:

Given Curaçao's demographic constraints, questions concerning cost-efficiency become relevant.

- Political Implications and Stakeholder Engagement

It is essential to recognize that the regulatory responsibilities of the CZa have been proposed to be integrated under the auspices of BT&P. Such a decision is not merely administrative; it is infused with nuanced political considerations that warrant critical examination. Issues such as sectorial synergies and governance transparency invite a wide array of academic inquiries. Therefore, advocating for a multifaceted consultative process involving stakeholders from healthcare professionals to civil society representatives is crucial. This inclusivity is vital

to creating a comprehensive policy framework that is both empirically grounded and democratically legitimate.

In conclusion, the collective intellectual effort we embark upon today is not merely a search for technocratic solutions; it is an existential journey toward shaping a healthcare framework that mutually nurtures the socio-economic and ethical foundations of our society.

In the realm of a healthcare framework, transparency and accessibility should take center stage.

Transparency and Public Accessibility of Treatment Protocols

The SER firmly believes that transparency and public accessibility of treatment protocols and

reimbursement criteria are fundamentally important for a fair and efficient healthcare system.

It is imperative that specific medical professional groups are well-informed about the content of healthcare contracts and treatment protocols. In this regard, the Healthcare Authority (currently in formation) is expected to play a pivotal role as a guiding and coordinating entity.

A fair and efficient healthcare system is not just an abstract principle; it carries concrete implications. For example, in the fields of physiotherapy, chiropractic, and exercise therapy, the current system, in which decision-making authority over reimbursements rests solely with the SVB, is both inefficient and potentially unjust. There is a genuine risk that treatments may be

denied for financial reasons rather than considering the insured person's recovery.

The SER reiterates the importance of establishing a Healthcare Authority and a Council for Public Health to formulate and advise on policies, protocols, and treatment criteria.

Budget Cuts and Sustainability

While financial sustainability is undoubtedly crucial, it must be balanced against long-term objectives that extend beyond mere budgetary considerations. This necessitates placing the discussion about a fair and efficient healthcare system in a broader context, addressing the complex challenges that the healthcare sector presents. It is essential that we

collectively find a path toward a sustainable and high-quality future for our healthcare system.

Exploring the Broader Context

In this light, a comprehensive ex-post evaluation of the implementation of the BVZ, including a comparative analysis of the National Contribution and premiums, could provide valuable insights.

Opportunities for Cost Savings through Collaboration

We must also explore opportunities to reduce healthcare costs without compromising the quality of care. For instance, physiotherapists and other professional groups see opportunities for savings without compromising healthcare quality.

Rising Healthcare Costs and Societal Benefits

In a world where healthcare costs rise annually due to aging, demographic shifts, and lifestyle-related diseases, we must focus on the bigger picture. The National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) emphasizes that, although healthcare is costly, it also brings significant benefits, especially in terms of health and prosperity. This insight transcends mere numbers; healthcare encompasses various types of care and has diverse effects. Moreover, promoting health, especially through prevention and a healthy lifestyle, plays a crucial role.

The RIVM has also analyzed the societal benefits of healthcare. Healthcare may be expensive, but it also delivers significant returns in terms of health and

prosperity. The interplay between health and prosperity is crucial. A healthy population contributes to economic growth, and increased prosperity allows us to invest more in health improvement.

Equitable Distribution of Healthcare Costs

We must consider how to distribute the burden of healthcare costs fairly. Accessibility and affordability of care must go hand in hand. We must ensure that management measures in healthcare do not jeopardize the quality, continuity, and accessibility of healthcare. The concept of affordable care for everyone is challenged when some individuals are unable to afford additional insurance. This shows that the cost burden is not always balanced with the care received.

Efficiency through Vision

Let's focus on achieving effective budget cuts, starting by reducing direct and indirect waste. An accessible treatment registration system can help avoid unnecessary costs. Minimizing referrals to specialists by strengthening primary care can also reduce costs. Reevaluating reimbursements for over-the-counter medications can promote their use and potentially save costs in the long run.

Prioritizing Primary Care and Prevention

We should aim for efficient and effective care, beginning with strengthening primary care and prevention. The principles of Primary Health Care, recommended by international organizations, should guide our approach. Investing in the organization of care and prevention will lead to a healthier society

and manageable costs. In doing so, we must not lose sight of the long term, as prevention yields results over time.

The Power of Collaboration and Consultation

The role of the Social Insurance Bank (SVB) in the policy process is of great importance. While their experience is valuable, we must also consider the input of other stakeholders. Changes in the BVZ and healthcare have an impact on society as a whole, so diverse perspectives must be considered.

A Guiding Star on the Horizon

Let us not forget that our ultimate goal is to achieve an affordable, accessible, and high-quality healthcare system. We must strive for a healthcare system that is not only financially sustainable but also

adaptable to changes. It goes beyond numbers and protocols; it's about the well-being of our community.

Honored guests,

The SER contemplates, at a future juncture and of its own accord, issuing a comprehensive advisory that delves into various facets, including but not limited to, the architecture of the current healthcare system, the governance structure, accessibility, associated costs, and health outcomes. This advisory aims to contribute to an academically rigorous, legally substantiated, and diplomatically nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in the existing framework in Curaçao.

In our search for solutions, we must be mindful of the societal impact of every decision we make. Let's combine our energy, share our insights, and unite our

strengths to create a healthcare system that will thrive not only for us but for generations to come.

Let us embark on this inspiring journey towards a brighter future for our healthcare today.

I Thank you.