

The care we would like to have

Arci Porco Rosso, 6 novembre 2023



Palermo is a city that welcomes thousands of asylum seekers and foreign residents without a residence permit every year. For these people, accessing healthcare can be a challenging and complex experience. Some of the key concerns related to healthcare services for foreign residents in Palermo's healthcare system include the following:

- **Difficulty in choosing a primary care physician:** Foreign individuals have the right to choose a primary care physician in their municipality of residence by themselves, but they are required to choose from those who have available appointments. This can lead to long waiting times and difficulties in finding an available doctor. Only recently there has been progress in establishing digital intermediation with some ASP (Provincial Health Authority Palermo) mediators who help individuals and activists with the necessary procedures. Furthermore, individuals with precarious and unregularizable status are entitled to be assigned the STP code (Straniero Temporaneamente Presente (Temporarily Resident Foreigner) - equivalent to the tax code), but often there is a lack of information, especially for people in transit, so it's common that people go directly to the emergency department of hospitals.
- **Staff misinformation:** Administrative personnel in offices, reception centres, and schools are often not adequately informed about the healthcare rights of foreigners. This can lead to confusion and delays in accessing care.
- **Lack of mediation:** Linguistic and cultural mediation is essential to ensure access to healthcare for foreigners. However, in practice, this function is often covered by short-term NGO projects that are not sustainable in the long run. Often untrained people are relied upon as interpreters as long as they speak one of the languages requested by users.
- **Lack of post-diagnosis facilities:** Foreigners diagnosed with chronic or complex illnesses often struggle to find facilities that can provide ongoing care.
- **Recent transformation of residence permits for medical treatment:** The Ministry of the Interior's decree has transformed the residence permit for medical treatment into a "temporary residence permit for medical treatment", which is no longer convertible into a permit for work or study reasons.



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Despite the above-mentioned issues, Palermo has well-structured and functional services for people on the move, characterized by a holistic, respectful and inclusive approach. Among these, we collaborate with and recommend:

- **The Assistance Center for Migrants and Vulnerable Populations within the Civic Hospital of Palermo.** The clinic, led by a team including Dr. Tullio Prestileo and Dr. Lucia Siracusa, is a medical and virology centre that is open to everyone, with particular attention to vulnerable and more fragile people. The clinic offers free initial screenings with urine and blood tests for the timely treatment of infectious diseases and a free vaccination program for everyone.
- **General medicine clinics for migrants** such as the Maternal Aid or the Hippocrates clinic in Ballarò, and the newly established Accura center, managed by Intersos.
- **Mental health services:** In the city, several free mental health services are available, including the ethnopsychology clinic at the PENC Centre or the ASP service, led by Dr. Sebastiano Vinci.

The national healthcare system is facing serious setbacks and limitations; the Palermo system still needs improvement to ensure equitable and affordable access to healthcare for all people, regardless of the colour of their passport or residence permit. We want a healthcare system that respects everyone and does not require the support or mediation of activists or operators for access to healthcare. Health is a right for all, and no one can put it at risk!

Translated from Italian by Angela La Cognata