



# State of Healthcare and the Portuguese National Health Service (SNS)

Political Instability, Workforce Crisis, and FNAM's Advocacy

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# Political Context Shaping Healthcare

1

## 2015-2023: Socialist Party Era

Eight years of Socialist governance established foundation policies for SNS modernization and expansion efforts

2

## 2023-2025: Coalition Government

PSD partnership with People's Party (CDS-PP) brings new healthcare priorities and administrative changes

3

## Electoral Turbulence

Five elections within a decade create policy discontinuity, disrupting long-term healthcare planning and implementation





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Five elections within a decade create policy discontinuity, disrupting long-term healthcare planning and implementation

This political instability has created a cascade of challenges for Portugal's healthcare system, **undermining consistent policy implementation** and strategic planning essential for effective public health delivery.



# Emergency Services in Crisis

## Service Disruptions

Emergency departments across Portugal face unprecedented closures and operational limitations, with **maternal and pediatric** services bearing the heaviest impact. Critical care facilities struggle to maintain 24/7 coverage.



- ❑ **Alarming Reality:** Over 100 births have occurred in inadequate conditions during the past two years due to maternal service closures and limited emergency obstetric care availability.

This crisis represents a fundamental threat to patient safety and public trust in Portugal's healthcare system, with vulnerable populations—pregnant women and children—facing the greatest risks.



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These closures force patients to travel **longer distances** for urgent care, creating dangerous delays in treatment and overwhelming remaining operational facilities.

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# The Family Doctor Shortage Crisis

**1.6M**

**Citizens Without Care**

Portuguese residents lacking  
assigned family physicians

**16%**

**Population Impact**

Percentage of total population  
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This gap in primary care creates a domino effect throughout the healthcare system.

Without adequate primary care access, patients increasingly turn to **emergency services** for routine medical needs, overwhelming already strained emergency departments and driving up healthcare costs while reducing quality of care.



# Healthcare Workforce Exodus



## Private Sector Migration

Physicians increasingly abandoning public SNS positions for better-compensated private practice opportunities, creating brain drain in public healthcare

## International Emigration

Portuguese-trained medical professionals seeking opportunities abroad, particularly in Northern European countries offering superior working conditions



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## Unsustainable Working Conditions Drive Exodus

- **Mandatory 9-hour workdays** with limited flexibility for work-life balance
- **Compulsory Saturday work** schedules without adequate compensation
- **Elimination of compensatory rest** periods following extended shifts
- Annual overtime requirements reaching **250 hours** per physician

These punitive working conditions have created a vicious cycle: as more physicians leave, remaining staff face increased workloads, further accelerating departures and undermining system sustainability.

# Administrative Instability and Leadership Crisis

## Management Turnover

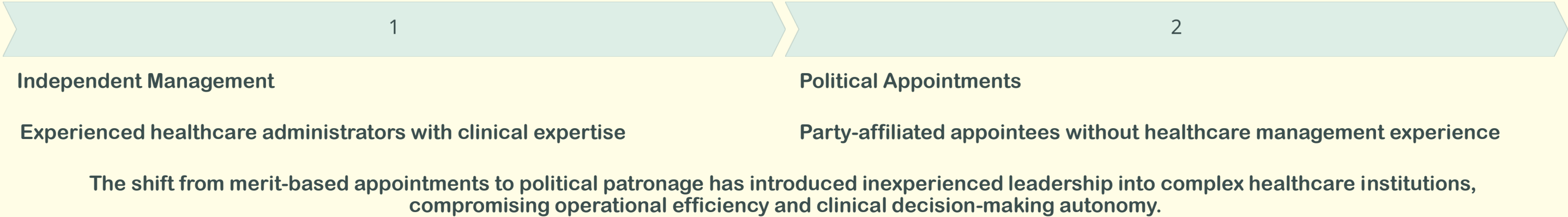
Portugal's healthcare system faces unprecedented leadership instability, with **frequent resignations** across Local Health Units and specialized institutions like the Portuguese Oncology Institute.

This constant turnover disrupts strategic planning, undermines institutional knowledge, and creates operational uncertainty that affects patient care quality and staff morale.



# Administrative Instability and Leadership Crisis

## Management Turnover



# Public-Private Partnerships: A Double-Edged Solution

01	02	03
<b>Hospital Transfers</b>	<b>Service Outsourcing</b>	<b>Selective Responsibility</b>
Full management transfer of public hospitals to private entities and charitable organizations, maintaining public funding while shifting operational control	Vaccination programs and teleconsultation services contracted to private providers, creating hybrid public-private service delivery models	Complex and high-cost cases remain under SNS management, while profitable routine services transfer to private sector

These partnerships represent a fundamental shift in Portugal's healthcare philosophy, potentially improving efficiency in some areas while raising concerns about equity, access, and the long-term sustainability of universal healthcare principles.

The selective nature of these arrangements—where private entities handle profitable services while the public sector retains expensive, complex cases—creates an asymmetrical financial burden that may undermine SNS viability.





# Policy Impacts: 2022-2025 Assessment

## Growing Healthcare Inequalities

Widening gaps between public and private healthcare access, with socioeconomic status increasingly determining quality and timeliness of care

## Career Precariousness

Medical professionals face uncertain employment conditions, temporary contracts, and inadequate career progression opportunities within public healthcare

## Public Health Compromise

Preventive care programs, population health initiatives, and community health services suffer from reduced funding and staffing

## FNAM's Legal Challenges

FNAM has mounted sustained legal opposition to the "Dedicação Plena" (Full Dedication) policy, arguing it violates physician autonomy and creates unsustainable working conditions.

- ❏ **Government Silence:** Since 2024, Portuguese government officials have refused to engage in meaningful negotiations with medical associations, escalating tensions and contributing to workforce instability.

# FNAM Advocacy & Resistance Actions

## Mobilization Strategies



### National Strike Campaigns

Coordinated nationwide work stoppages involving thousands of physicians across all specialties, disrupting non-emergency services to highlight workforce concerns



### Public Demonstrations

Large-scale protests in major Portuguese cities, drawing public attention to healthcare system deterioration and physician working conditions



### Doctors in Struggle Movement

Grassroots physician activism movement organizing resistance to harmful policies and advocating for sustainable healthcare reform



## International Advocacy

FNAM has strategically engaged with European Union institutions, presenting Portugal's healthcare crisis to EU health committees and seeking international pressure for policy reform

This international dimension recognizes that healthcare workforce mobility within the EU makes Portugal's policies a regional concern, affecting healthcare capacity across member s



# Achievements & Protections Secured



## Collective Agreements

Successfully maintained existing collective bargaining agreements protecting physician employment terms, salary structures, and working conditions despite government pressure for concessions



## Age Limit Protections

Preserved mandatory retirement age limits preventing exploitation of senior physicians and ensuring sustainable career progression pathways



## Compensatory Rest Rights

Defended essential rest periods following extended shifts, maintaining physician health and patient safety standards despite administrative pressure



## Time Bank Rejection

Successfully opposed government proposals for mandatory time banking systems that would have eliminated overtime compensation and flexible scheduling

These achievements represent critical victories in preserving fundamental worker protections within Portugal's public healthcare system, establishing important precedents for future negotiations and policy development.



# Conclusion & Call to Action

**System Instability**

SNS faces unprecedented challenges from political instability and progressive privatization threatening universal healthcare access

**FNAM's Defense**

Continued advocacy for physician rights and public healthcare system integrity through legal, political, and grassroots action



**Workforce Retention**

Critical need for sustainable employment conditions and competitive compensation to prevent continued medical professional exodus

**Equitable Access**

Ensuring all Portuguese citizens maintain access to quality healthcare regardless of geographic location or socioeconomic status

Portugal stands at a critical juncture in healthcare policy. The decisions made today will determine whether the SNS survives as a robust universal healthcare system or fragments into a two-tiered structure favoring those with private insurance.

**The path forward requires immediate action:** sustainable workforce policies, adequate funding, and political commitment to public healthcare principles. FNAM remains steadfast in defending both physician rights and patient access to quality care.



# Thank you!

