

UNIPOLIS FOUNDATION LAUNCHES “VICINI DI SALUTE”: A PROJECT TO STRENGTHEN ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE IN INLAND AREAS

The initiative involves the areas of Ventasso (Reggio Emilia) and Accettura (Matera). It aims to improve access to healthcare services for people over 65 through local welfare, telemedicine, and community networks.

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The new project “**Vicini di Salute**” (Health Neighbours), promoted by the Unipolis Foundation as part of its Welfare Division, has been created with the objective of guaranteeing the right to health and care for older people living in the country’s most isolated areas, while strengthening community welfare models capable of generating proximity, guidance, and ongoing support.

The initiative is launching in two Italian inland areas—Ventasso, in the province of Reggio Emilia, and Accettura, in the province of Matera—selected for their active and robust local networks, particularly community cooperatives committed to local development and addressing the social needs of their communities. The Valle dei Cavalieri and Briganti del Cerreto cooperatives operate in Ventasso, while the Siamo Accettura cooperative operates in Accettura.

“Vicini di Salute” was born out of the desire to develop sustainable and reproducible local interventions in the field of healthcare and well-being, based on the active involvement of local communities and on collaboration between public-sector and third-sector entities. The project is promoted by the Unipolis Foundation in collaboration with SiSalute, CRU Unipol, the national and regional offices of Legacoop in the participating areas, the national and local branches of AUSER, as well as the aforementioned partner community cooperatives.

According to data provided by Istituto Superiore di Sanità (Italian National Institute of Health) in “PASSI d’Argento” (national surveillance and monitoring system for over 65s) for the two-year period 2022-2023, 23% of people over 65 who needed checkups or diagnostic tests said they had given up trying to obtain the necessary care. The main reasons for this included long waiting lists, difficulties in reaching healthcare facilities, and the high cost of services. This situation is particularly critical in inland and rural areas, where the distance from healthcare services, an aging population, and a lack of local facilities make access to care more difficult.

In this context, “Vicini di Salute” intends to test an integrated model of local welfare that combines community services, personalised support, and telemedicine tools, consistent with the guidelines for

community care innovation and strengthening set forth in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR).

The project involves a total of 100 beneficiaries over 65, 50 for each area, identified with the support of community cooperatives and local institutions. Local service desks have been set up in the areas to serve as orientation, engagement, and support points of contact for beneficiaries. These offices are staffed with dedicated case management operators to assist seniors in accessing healthcare services, booking appointments for checkups and tests, and using telemedicine tools.

Where it is not possible to book public checkups through the National Health Service, the initiative provides financial coverage for checkups at facilities affiliated with SiSalute or other private-sector entities. Other services offered include transportation from home to the healthcare facilities and home delivery of medications. Finally, information sessions dedicated to prevention, health, and healthy lifestyles are organised in collaboration with AUSER local offices.

Telemedicine is another element of the project. Teleconsultation, telemonitoring, and remote healthcare support services, with a particular focus on the most common chronic diseases among the elderly population, are available in collaboration with SiSalute. The technology is integrated into a relationship of proximity and support, without replacing the direct doctor-patient relationship, but facilitating its continuity.

A cross-cutting element of the project will also be the creation of regional working groups with institutions, local healthcare facilities, local authorities, healthcare professionals, and stakeholders from the areas involved, with the aim of fostering coordination among all participants and contributing to the project's development based on any emerging needs.

The initiative will be accompanied by an impact assessment entrusted to a third-party, aimed at measuring the social value generated by the experiment and identifying areas where the initiative may be replicated in other local contexts.

“With Vicini di Salute, Unipolis begins to carry out its own welfare projects directly. This is a sensitive area precisely because it is perfectly aligned with our core business, but it is also affected by a multitude of needs. We chose to leverage the Unipol Group’s skills, tools, and networks to offer a valuable service that enhances the role of the Third Sector in its relationship with the Public Sector, a primary player in welfare provision,” commented Marisa Parmigiani, CEO of the Unipolis Foundation.

Fondazione Unipolis

Fondazione Unipolis is the corporate foundation of the Unipol Group. By designing and supporting initiatives capable of generating social value, it promotes social equity, creating opportunities for the most vulnerable. It fosters people's autonomy through an inclusive and collaborative approach, in synergy with those who want to generate positive change.

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