

Mallu does the rounds

Delivering cost-effective health care services in rural Finland



Summary

The ‘Mallu does the rounds’ project provided an easy-to-access medical service to people in rural areas of Finland using the Mallu bus. The bus met important needs amongst rural populations as well as providing the social and health care authorities with vital information about rural healthcare needs.



Type of project

Balanced territorial development of rural economies and communities

Priority/focus area, measure

Balanced territorial development

Theme

Healthcare

Location

Mallu, Finland

Funding

Total project cost €112,000
EAFRD contribution €48,000

Type of beneficiary

Public Health Care Service

Duration

July 2011 – August 2013

Website

www.eksote.fi/mallu

Description

Official project title

‘Mallu does the rounds’ project: Mallu-auto palvelee eri puolilla Etelä-Karjalaa.



Context and needs

Rural Europe is a popular place to live, work, and visit but challenges exist in supplying social services to isolated areas or dispersed populations. Cost is a major factor with healthcare providers needing to locate their main facilities in centralised sites. Rural residents, workers and visitors thus have to travel to towns if they need any form of medical attention. Another increasingly important rural development consideration is the demand for rural healthcare, because populations now commonly contain higher proportions of elderly people, who may have higher medical needs but who are less able to travel.

Member States have used funding from their RDPs to introduce new ways of overcoming these quality of life challenges. In Finland this includes providing mobile healthcare services for remote areas and the ‘Mallu bus’ project demonstrates the broad range of benefits that this type of good practice can deliver.

Objectives

The Mallu bus was designed by the South Karelia Social and Health Care District (Eksote) to be an easy-to-use medical service for people in rural areas. It also aimed to collate information and evidence for Eksote about the rural healthcare needs of less-populated areas. The focus was to develop a new way of serving social and health care services, especially Long Term Care services, in less populated and rural areas. Another aim was to offer cost-efficient and flexible services through its new integrated mobile facility.

Activities

Introduced in 2010 by Eksote, the project actions centred on converting a mobile caravan and fitting it out as the mobile healthcare centre. Nurses provide a carefully coordinated set of medical services from the mobile unit. These cover pharmacy tasks such as influenza vaccines, health guidance, conducting small operations like removing stitches and clearing ears. Blood pressure monitoring, blood sugar sampling and related advice are also offered. On-board computer and broadband equipment connect the nurses to centralised patient information systems. These bring all the health district’s databases to the vehicle and the technology can be used for real-time consulting with more specialised medical staff if needed.

Planning ensures a fixed route around a catchment area of eight municipalities taking in at least 100,000 potential patients. The service is available to local residents as well as tourists or other visitors to the area. Nurses aim to visit each site on the Mallu route every fortnight.

The time the vehicle stays at one location varies from one hour upwards, depending on the need. Patients can book appointments online or by telephone and the Mallu bus has also been used to carry out specialised themed services, such as diabetes awareness campaigns.

Results

Project results have introduced more advanced services to locations that lacked access to a dedicated healthcare centre. By doing so, the Mallu bus project has made valuable contributions to the wellbeing and health of people in rural areas. It has been especially good for supporting the independent living of elderly residents and has helped to prevent illness.

Whilst the RDP project has benefited a great many different patients, its main customer-base is elderly people who experience problems travelling to hospitals or other health clinics. Data collected from Mallu's daily activities has confirmed the service needs of these and other rural residents. Such information is being used by health authorities to support the design of their existing service network, plus new operating models in South Karelia and nationwide.

Additional assistance, including dental treatment, has been incorporated into an upgraded Mallu community care service. The mobile nurses are also expanding their functions to issue prescriptions for medicines and carry out preliminary care assessments.

Lessons

Lessons learned include proving the benefits from this mobile approach to rural healthcare, which aids cost-effectiveness for patients and Eksote because the nurses only recommend patients to a doctor if they really need an appointment. This good practice enables the doctors to concentrate better on their own tasks and therefore improves the efficiency of regional health centres.

The Mallu bus successes are encouraging Eksote to consider visionary new rural development ideas for enhanced health care services. These could be delivered through cooperation between more health authorities to provide larger scale and more extensive mobile medical care.

Quotes from beneficiaries/participants

“When services are centralised, distances grow. Mobile services are a very good thing for clients. Clinic buses can bring many tests and procedures closer to residents.”

Jukka Kärkkäinen: National Institute for Health and Welfare, Finland.

“The routing has been developed in close cooperation with village associations.”

Merja Tepponen: Eksote

“The social service and health care areas could have a shared vehicle – like a semi-trailer truck that could even fit x-ray equipment. It could make rounds in the border areas of Eastern Finland, from Virolahti to Ilomantsi.”

Pentti Itkonen: Eksote’s Managing Director

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Additional sources of information, links

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Un_KbY-4JJ4