



# General Practice as a Profession

Professional Reference Framework for General Practice

**Summary** March 2025



# A rapidly changing context

## Profound changes are transforming our healthcare system:

- **An ageing population:**  
Nearly one in three people in France will be aged 65 or over by 2070;
- **The rise in chronic diseases:**  
20% of the population currently benefit from long-term condition coverage (ALD), accounting for 66% of health insurance expenditure;
- **Persistent health inequalities**  
despite a life expectancy higher than the European Union average;
- **The emergence of new health risks**  
linked to increasingly sedentary lifestyles, climate change, and psychosocial risks;
- **The rapid retirement of many physicians,**  
which is not being sufficiently offset by the increasing number of trained medical students;
- **The decline in the number of physicians in regular practice** despite an overall increase in the total number of active physicians;
- **The reduction in physicians' working hours,**  
as well as that of all healthcare professionals, partly linked to the search for a better work-life balance;

- **Persistent regional inequalities in access to healthcare,** which are worsening in certain areas that particularly lack access to healthcare professionals and public services;
- **The emergence of new technologies and tools** (shared medical records, ultrasound, etc.) **and now artificial intelligence;**
- **The development of health democracy,** with greater patient involvement in the organisation of the healthcare system and participatory approaches in health.

## Given these challenges, general practice is a major asset for our healthcare system.

- **By effectively meeting most of the population's healthcare needs** across all regions, as close as possible to patients;
- **Through its capacity to adapt** to public health challenges;
- **Through its contribution** to the financial sustainability of the healthcare system.

**It is with this in mind that the Collège de la Médecine Générale launched a collaborative and participatory initiative, open to all sectors of the profession, to draft a reference document that redefines the profession's values, missions, competencies and commitments.**

**This document is intended for all healthcare professionals, stakeholders in the healthcare system, public authorities and the general population.**

# A profession that has evolved significantly

## General practice remains the cornerstone of our healthcare system.

**Its mission is rooted in a fundamental principle: providing comprehensive, continuous, and personalised care for everyone throughout their lives**

### **The general practitioner is often the first medical contact for patients.**

Their role extends beyond diagnosing and treating diseases. They also contribute to disease prevention, support patients, and oversee the coordination of care provided to patients, ensuring comprehensive, appropriate, and continuous management. They also play a vital role in referring patients to specific specialists, when necessary, as part of the care pathway.

### **General practitioners**

- provide first-contact care,
- see patients of all ages and for any health concern,
- deliver the right care at the right time and in the right place,
- collectively and in a coordinated manner ensure long-term follow-up and continuity of care,
- adapt their practice to the needs of the local population they serve.

### **The profession has changed significantly in recent years.**

General practice is defined by its function rather than its setting, provided it meets the criteria of the discipline.

### **The traditional model of general practice within private practice is no longer the only form of practice.**

Today, general practitioners work at various levels of the healthcare system.

Most often working as general practitioners, they may also practise in maternal and child health services, nursing homes, as well as in on-call and continuity-of-care services.

Salaried roles are also developing increasingly within health centres.

### **This diversity of practice reflects both the richness of professional aspirations and the adaptability of general practitioners.**

Given the shortage of physicians, healthcare provision must be aligned more closely with the population's needs. The development of different practice models must be responsible, with an emphasis on those that address healthcare needs. **It is particularly essential to maintain the necessary number of general practitioners acting as primary care physicians to ensure a well-coordinated care pathway.**

### **Beyond the diversity of their practice settings, all general practitioners share a set of core values:**

- A commitment to excellence and appropriate care.
- A relationship with patients based on trust and empathy.
- Reliance on validated scientific knowledge.
- Freedom and accountability in clinical decision-making.
- Fairness and unconditional acceptance of all patients.
- Openness to everyone's uniqueness.
- Critical thinking and the quality of information provided.
- Honesty in communication and information with patients.
- Availability.
- Respect for one's own professional limits.

# General practitioners: **community-minded professionals**

**To address the challenge of equitable access to healthcare, general practice has already undergone significant change in recent years.**

Aware of the challenges and expectations that still lie ahead, it remains committed to continued change and to fully contribute to future developments. To this end, it has put forward four proposals that are central to its commitments

## **1** Strengthening the relationship of trust between patient and physician

**Every year, 80% of the French population consults a general practitioner at least once. On average, consultations last 17 minutes, which is among the longest in Europe.**

This is a tremendous asset for ensuring continuity of care, preventing the onset or worsening of diseases, and limiting additional tests or referrals to other specialists to only where strictly necessary.

**The long-term relationship of trust built with patients also enables better care and an accurate response to healthcare needs.**

This is the French model that we must preserve, while adapting it to new health challenges and to new interprofessional and participatory practices, not only because it enables better care, but also because it proves to be more cost-effective and responsible for our healthcare system.

**To achieve this, it is particularly important to:**

- Maintain physicians' ability to adapt consultation times to patients' needs to better address complex situations;
- Strengthen healthcare professionals' training in communication skills and active listening;
- Increase their awareness of mental health issues, which account for 30% of general practice activity.





## 2 Developing collaboration between healthcare professionals

**Whether due to necessity or choice, being a general practitioner is becoming less of a solitary profession.**

In salaried or private practice, group practice is increasingly common, taking the form of group clinics, medical centres, or multidisciplinary health centres.

A more collaborative and comprehensive approach to healthcare practices benefits everyone, which helps improve patient guidance and care, frees up physician time, reduces professional isolation, provides more comprehensive care, and better addresses local health needs.

**To facilitate the development of a more collaborative approach, it is necessary to:**

- Strengthen primary care around general practitioners by enabling them to work in the same location as nurses and medical assistants;
- Assign these teams shared responsibility for prevention, care coordination, and patient follow-up, acting as primary care providers for their patients;
- Organise, with the support of Communautés Professionnelles Territoriales de Santé (CPTS – Territorial Primary Care Communities), patient care pathways within their local area by coordinating primary care professionals (general practitioners, nurses, pharmacists, and physiotherapists) using appropriate information-sharing tools;
- Develop closer cooperation with social and medico-social sectors at local level;
- Organise and regulate access to secondary care and healthcare facilities according to patients' needs and priorities;
- Develop undergraduate and continuing education programs that bring together students from different healthcare professions;
- Conduct collaborative action-research projects focused on regional and population health challenges;
- Strengthen undergraduate training for general practitioners in teamwork and project management skills

### 3 Ensuring social and environmental responsibility rooted in local communities

Finally, thanks to its strong local presence, the profession works in collaboration with other healthcare professionals to address social and regional health inequalities.

With their in-depth knowledge of the areas in which they practise and of the diversity of the patients they serve, general practitioners, alongside other healthcare professionals, **play a key role in health education, public health monitoring, and the identification of emerging risks**, in cooperation with local elected officials and regional health agencies. They also have a specific responsibility to promote environmentally sustainable healthcare and to encourage more appropriate and sustainable prescribing practices.

#### To strengthen these roles, we must:

- Reinforce the regional structure of our healthcare system by relying on general practitioners to develop local healthcare initiatives;
- Conduct regional assessments of healthcare supply, demand, and needs, involving all stakeholders (local elected representatives, service users, and healthcare professionals) in the implementation of tailored action plans.

### 4 Placing primary care at the heart of our healthcare system

Addressing today's health challenges requires placing primary care, of which general practitioners are key contributors alongside other professionals, at the heart of the healthcare system.

This framework outlines how our expertise, **applied across our various roles**, supports this collective response.

**Greater recognition of primary care by public authorities**, whether political, regulatory, or financial, along with a shift from a predominantly curative model of medicine to a more preventive approach are key pillars of a more efficient, inclusive, and resilient healthcare system.

**General practitioners will be better able to fulfil their role** in these changes if primary care is prioritised in long-term planning, both at national and local levels.

**In doing so, we can collectively meet the challenge of ensuring equitable access to healthcare and health for all citizens.**





# General Practice as a profession

Professional Reference Framework  
for General Practice

**Summary** March 2025



Access to the  
**digital version**  
of the document



Access to the  
**full version**  
of the reference  
framework