

Emergency departments are facing increased numbers of patients, as well as long wait times which may lead to negative health outcomes. It is important to better understand the reasons for why patients use emergency department services, particularly among those patients who frequently return to the emergency department (have ≥ 5 visits per year). There are many factors that contribute to this; however, no research studies have examined the entire patient health care pathway from pre-hospital care to in-hospital care across multiple sites. This project examines five interconnected objectives in adult patients who frequently return to the emergency department in six cities in Poland: 1) to investigate the health care use patterns of pre-hospital services among these patients; 2) to explore and compare the characteristics associated with high emergency department use; 3) to identify the reasons for high emergency department use from the patient perspective; 4) to determine the factors associated with admission to and course in hospital among these patients; and 5) to propose evidence-based recommendations to health service planners to improve patient-centred health care options for these patients. A mixed methods study, using numerical and focus group data, will be undertaken. For the numerical data, quantitative analyses (descriptive statistics, logistic regression models) will be done using hospital data from 2022-2024 from six university hospitals in Warszawa, Kraków, Poznań, Gdańsk, Białystok, and Rzeszów. Information from focus groups of patient representatives will be thematically analyzed. Based on the results, the project will propose recommendations to improve local delivery of health services in a patient-centred and equitable manner. This research is required to discover the health care utilization pathways among these vulnerable patients, while also improving the situation in emergency departments given limited health resources. The study results will be shared with relevant groups, including patients, health professionals, and policy makers.