What it Looks Like in Costa Rica

• Run by the Costa Rican Social Security Administration
• Financed by employers, employees, and the Ministry of Health. Employer and employee contributions together make up over 90% of contributions.
• Costa Rica is divided into 105 health areas, which are further divided up into primary care units called Basic Provision Units of Integrated Healthcare, or EBAIS. There are 947 of these primary care centers throughout Costa Rica, and everyone is assigned to one.
• The EBAIS clinics provide a wide range of services to cover the general and specific health needs of the community, including primary care visits, vaccinations, OB/GYN services, etc.
• There is a second tier of care with 11 clinics and 20 hospitals for specialty procedures, consultations, and emergency visits.
• There is also a third tier for specialized surgeries and treatments, with 7 hospitals country-wide.

Strengths

• Chronic conditions are well-managed
• Less emergency visits and ER use
• Patients get consistent diet and nutrition advice
• Shorter waiting times
• Some specialty appointments (EKGs, PAP smears, etc.) taken care of same-day at local clinic
• Fewer days lost to illness and disability

Weaknesses

• Longer wait times for specialist appointments
• Technological innovation and research lacking
• Lower sanitary standards comparable to richer health systems

Determinants of a Good Life, or ‘Pura Vida’

• How long do you live?
  • Life expectancy

• How healthy are you?
  • A disability-adjusted life year, or DALY, measures the gap between current and ideal health status. It can be thought of as one lost year of healthy life. It is calculated by adding Years of Life Lost (YLL) and Years Lost to Disability (YLD): DALY = YLL + YLD

• How happy are you?
  • The Happy Planet Index, or HPI, is an index of well-being and environmental impact. It is based on the principle that most people want to live long and fulfilling lives. Countries that score the best are ones that allow their citizens enough freedom to do this, but not by impacting the ability of future generations or people in other countries to do the same. It takes into account 3 things: Well-being, life expectancy, and ecological footprint.
  • Sounds like the American Dream, right?

Costa Rica vs. the United States

Life expectancy:

Costa Rica | U.S.
--- | ---
77 years - men | 77 years - men
81 years - women | 82 years - women

Disability-adjusted life years (DALYs):

Costa Rica | U.S.
--- | ---
.22 | .29

Happy Planet Index (HPI): Rank

Costa Rica | U.S.
--- | ---
#1 | #105

Implementable Aspects for the U.S.

• Require everyone to have affordable access to a Primary Care Physician, and encourage health care plans to connect people to doctors offices with room for new patients
• Learn from the emerging market of urgent care clinics, where patients can get many of their tests done one after another in one building on the same visit
• Institute a program to encourage more medical students to choose primary care specialties
• Increase the ease of getting a fast appointment with a doctor and increase the affordability of medications