Local services, health and wellbeing

- **Purpose:** Improve access to essential services and healthcare to enhance quality of life in rural regions.
- **Challenges:** Service shortages, aging population, and workforce constraints.
- **Relevant EU Policies and Initiatives**: EU Health Strategy, Cohesion Policy for social infrastructure, European Pillar of Social Rights.[1]
- **Opportunities for Rural Actors**: Rural actors can advocate for telemedicine, participate in health innovation projects, and shape service delivery models.

MFF Insights[2]

- Health and wellbeing are covered, with EU funds supporting research, infrastructure, prevention, and digitalisation.
- However, the proposals again lean toward technical outputs (equipment, m² of facilities, digital platforms deployed) rather than outcomes relevant for rural populations, such as service accessibility, patient satisfaction, and equity of provision.
- For depopulating and ageing rural communities, the missing dimensions risk leaving structural inequalities unaddressed.
- Opportunities exist in adopting place-based health metrics (travel times to services, affordability, digital uptake in sparsely populated areas) and integrating wellbeing outcomes into the evaluation of investments in rural services.

Questions

1. **Local services, health and wellbeing**

    1.1. What if rural areas became the EU's frontrunners for digital healthcare, instead of the last to benefit?
    1.2. How do we redesign EU support so that services in rural areas are *better* than in urban centres, not just "catching up"?
    1.3. Can EU, national and regional funds work together to turn shrinking populations into an opportunity for *resilient service innovation*?

EU Funded specific

a. Rural communities often face limited access to digital health and telemedicine. How can EU support help them lead the way in innovative, accessible, and equitable healthcare?

[1] Sinerma, J., & Pazos-Vidal, S. (2025). Analysis of EU policies around rural innovation, RURACTIVE Policy Brief. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15227863

[2] AEIDL on behalf of RURACTIVE submission public consultation EU's next long-term budget (MFF) – implementing EU funding with Member States and regions - Feedback from: European Association for Innovation in Local Development (AEIDL)

b. Current performance metrics overlook the real-life experiences of rural residents. What new indicators could capture accessibility, affordability, satisfaction, and overall wellbeing to guide more effective EU investments?