

# Analysis of the relationship between hospital governance and health outcomes in Ecuador: a systematic review

*Análisis de la relación entre la gobernanza hospitalaria y los resultados de salud en Ecuador: una revisión sistemática*

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## Abstract

This paper aimed to analyze the relationship between hospital governance and health outcomes in Ecuador through a systematic review of recent studies. The PRISMA protocol was applied, ensuring transparency in the selection and evaluation of articles. The search was conducted in academic databases such as Scopus, PubMed, Web of Science, and SciELO, using keywords combined with Boolean operators. Studies published between 2018 and 2025, in English and Spanish, were included. The results, derived from the analysis of 18 studies, show that the implementation of hospital governance models focused on transparency and active participation significantly contributes to improving the quality of health services and user satisfaction. However, significant barriers were also identified, such as a lack of inter-institutional coordination and a shortage of resources in rural areas, which limit the effectiveness of health policies. Among the most relevant findings, the need to strengthen institutional governance by integrating participatory approaches, financial transparency, and ongoing training for healthcare personnel stands out. These actions can promote sustainable improvements in health outcomes in the medium term. Thus, we conclude that strengthened hospital governance is key to optimizing the quality and equity of the Ecuadorian health system.

**Keywords:** hospital governance, health outcomes, citizen participation.

## Resumen

El presente trabajo tuvo como objetivo analizar la relación entre la gobernanza hospitalaria y los resultados de salud en Ecuador mediante una revisión sistemática de estudios recientes. Para ello, se aplicó el protocolo PRISMA, garantizando transparencia en la selección y evaluación de los artículos. La búsqueda se realizó en bases de datos académicas como Scopus, PubMed, Web of Science y SciELO, utilizando palabras clave combinadas con operadores booleanos. Se incluyeron estudios publicados entre 2018 y 2025, en inglés y español. Los resultados, derivados del análisis de 18 estudios, evidencian que la implementación de modelos de gobernanza hospitalaria centrados en la transparencia y la participación activa contribuye significativamente a mejorar la calidad de los servicios de salud y la satisfacción de los usuarios. Sin embargo, también se identificaron barreras importantes, como la falta de coordinación interinstitucional y la escasez de recursos en zonas rurales, las cuales limitan la efectividad de las políticas sanitarias. Entre los hallazgos más relevantes, destaca la necesidad de fortalecer la gobernanza institucional mediante la integración de enfoques participativos, la transparencia financiera y la capacitación continua del personal sanitario. Estas acciones pueden promover, a mediano plazo, mejoras sostenibles en los resultados de salud. Así, se concluye que una gobernanza hospitalaria fortalecida es clave para optimizar la calidad y equidad del sistema de salud en Ecuador.

**Palabras clave:** gobernanza hospitalaria, resultados de salud, participación ciudadana.

## Introduction

Hospital governance is a fundamental factor for the quality, efficiency, and equity of health systems, particularly in countries like Ecuador, where institutional structures exhibit considerable variability. This concept refers to the processes and structures that guide decision-making, policy implementation, and resource management in the healthcare sector (González & Cejas, 2024). Unlike governance, which emphasizes the

government's ability to execute action plans based on political agreements, governance promotes a dynamic interaction among various actors: the state, citizens, academia, and the private sector, aiming to formulate public policies that effectively address social needs (Vinueza & Espinoza, 2023). In the hospital context, this approach involves adopting contemporary management practices, fostering citizen participation, and ensuring accountability to achieve concrete health outcomes.

In this context, the present study arises from the evident disconnect between hospital management structures and the expected health outcomes. Although Ecuador has made progress in access to health services through public policies aimed at the Good Living paradigm (Pilco & Fernández, 2020), users frequently express dissatisfaction with the quality of care received. The primary reasons for this discontent include long waiting lists, shortages of medical supplies, and deficiencies in care—factors that affect perceptions of efficiency, accessibility, and infrastructure, highlighting the challenges still faced by public hospitals in their institutional governance (Guaita et al., 2023).

Thus, studying this topic is essential for several reasons. First, the citizen demand for tangible improvements in the healthcare system has prompted, and even compelled, governments to strengthen primary care, expand coverage, and differentiate levels of hospital care (Bustamante et al., 2022). Moreover, user satisfaction, closely linked to service quality, becomes a key criterion for evaluating the effectiveness of health policies. In this regard, Bustamante et al. (2020) note that while quality and satisfaction are distinct concepts, they are deeply interconnected and should be analyzed together within the health sector.

From this perspective, Guarderas et al. (2020) identify three approaches regarding the role of the state in the provision of public health services, which help understand how political and ideological decisions influence hospital governance models:

- **Orthodox liberal:** views health as a market service, limiting state intervention to regulating the private sector.
- **Redistributive liberal:** understands health as a social right and promotes public policies that encourage collaboration with private actors.
- **Marxist egalitarian:** proposes health as a fundamental human right, demands free services, and advocates for a comprehensive model funded exclusively by public resources.

These three perspectives directly impact institutional design, accountability mechanisms, and the quality of services provided.

Regarding Ecuador, its health system has undergone crises and transformation processes. During the 1980s, the implementation of neoliberal policies restricted state intervention, weakening healthcare infrastructure and consolidating a fragmented and exclusionary biomedical model. However, since 2008, structural reforms have been implemented that strengthen the leadership of the Ministry of Public Health (MSP), expand free coverage, and adopt a social determinants-based approach to health (Vera et al., 2022). Currently, more than 80% of the population is served by public centers managed by the MSP, the Ecuadorian Institute of Social Security (IESS), and other governmental entities (Ortiz et al., 2019). Nevertheless, despite the increase in public health investment—ranging between 5% and 7% of the General State Budget in recent years (Carpio et al., 2021)—health decisions continue to be influenced by political factors, limiting the effectiveness of hospital governance policies.

Various studies have demonstrated that effective hospital governance positively affects both quality perception and clinical outcomes. For example, research by Bustamante et al. (2022) reveals that the empathy and responsiveness of staff significantly influence user satisfaction. Likewise, Zambrano and Vegas (2023) emphasize the relevance of open government and citizen participation as tools that enhance transparency and social control in hospital management. Furthermore, López and Cejas (2023) point out that well-structured institutional governance can optimize efficiency in human resource management, a key aspect for achieving sustainable institutional objectives. However, the literature still shows a gap regarding the direct relationship between the various components of hospital governance.

The current context in Ecuador demands a more integrated governance model capable of responding to the growing need for medical care through efficient resource management, solid institutional processes, and measurable health outcomes. In this sense, it is crucial to strengthen hospital autonomy, promote clinical leadership, implement mechanisms for constant evaluation, and ensure accountability to consolidate a fairer, more inclusive, and effective system. Understanding the relationship between governance elements and health outcomes will help guide the design of more relevant public policies, tailored to the institutional and territorial realities of the country.

For this reason, the present study aims to clarify the relationship between hospital governance and health outcomes in Ecuador. Its general objective is to analyze how the components of hospital governance relate to the health indicators reported in Ecuadorian hospitals over the past decade. Its specific objectives focus on characterizing the documented approaches to hospital governance in the national scientific literature, identifying the most commonly used indicators to evaluate hospital performance, and examining the interaction between these elements and the outcomes obtained based on the available empirical evidence.

## Methodology

The systematic review was conducted through a documentary and analytical approach, rigorously following the guidelines of the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol. This allowed for a strict process of searching, selecting, and analyzing the available scientific literature. Initially, the research question was formulated, and objectives were established, which guided the development of the search strategy detailed in Table 1.

The search was conducted in the Scopus, PubMed, Web of Science, and SciELO databases, using keywords such as "hospital governance," "health outcomes," "governance in healthcare," "hospital management," "health indicators," "Ecuador," "healthcare results," and "Latin America." These keywords were combined using Boolean operators "AND" and "OR" to optimize the retrieval of relevant articles.

**Table 1**  
*Search strategy*

Database	Search route
PubMed	"hospital governance" AND "health outcomes" AND "Ecuador"
Scopus	"governance in healthcare" OR "hospital management" AND "health indicators" AND "Ecuador"
Web of Science	"hospital governance" AND "healthcare results" AND "Latin America"
SciELO	"hospital governance" AND "health outcomes" AND "Ecuador"

The inclusion criteria were as follows:

- Articles available in English or Spanish.
- Peer-reviewed studies.
- Publications from 2018 to 2025.
- Research addressing, directly or indirectly, the relationship between hospital governance and health outcomes in the Ecuadorian context.

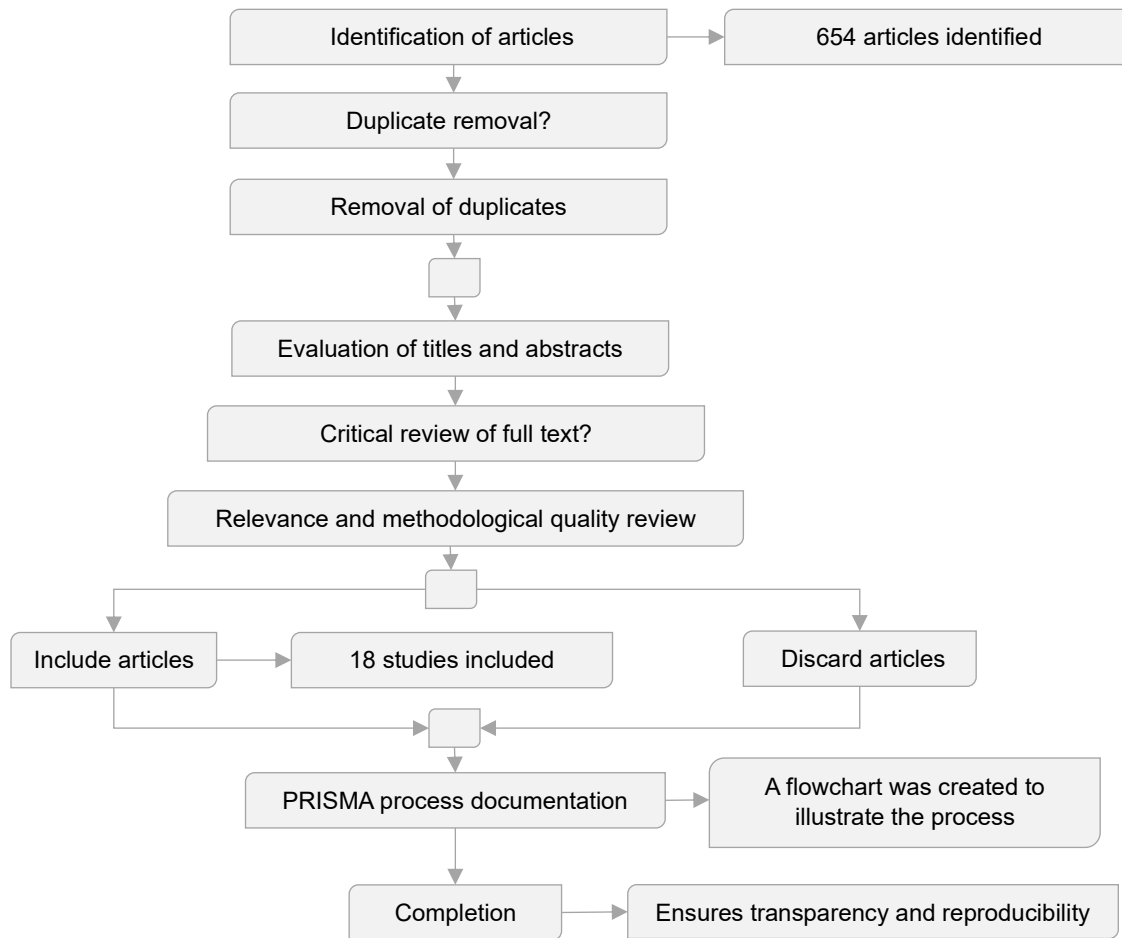
On the other hand, the following were excluded:

- Duplicate studies.
- Documents without full access or requiring payment.
- Literature reviews prior to 2018.
- Studies in languages other than English or Spanish.
- Publications not addressing the central theme of the study.

Initially, 654 articles were identified; after removing duplicates and filtering according to the criteria, titles and abstracts were reviewed, selecting 46 studies for a complete critical reading. Finally, 18 studies met all the requirements and provided pertinent information for the objectives of this review.

To ensure the transparency and replicability of the process, a flowchart was created according to the PRISMA protocol (Figure 1), which supports the traceability of each phase of the selection process.

**Figure 1**  
Article selection process



**Note.** Author's own elaboration

Finally, the extracted data were organized into tables that facilitated their analysis, allowing for a clear identification of the results based on the specific objectives outlined. In particular, it was possible to examine in detail the hospital governance models implemented, the health outcome indicators used, and how both elements interact in the various institutional contexts present in the country.

## Results and discussion

From the systematic review conducted, the most relevant findings that help understand the relationship between hospital governance and health outcomes in the Ecuadorian context are summarized in a table. The results are structured according to the three specific objectives set: to characterize the approaches to hospital governance, to identify the most commonly used indicators for evaluating hospital outcomes, and to analyze the interaction between governance components and health outcomes. The main findings for each objective, based on the reviewed articles, are presented below.

### a) Approaches to hospital governance in Ecuadorian scientific studies

The analyzed studies allow for the identification of various approaches to hospital governance applied in Ecuador. Trends are mainly observed toward the institutionalization of processes, the democratization of information, the strengthening of citizen participation, and the adoption of modern managerial models, such as New Public Management.

**Table 2***Approaches to hospital governance documented in the Ecuadorian context*

No.	Author / Year	Title	Method	Main Results	Journal
1	Molina (2019)	Governance of the National Health System	Case Study	Evidence of weak governance due to institutional fragmentation, hindering coordination between care levels. Proposes strengthening integrated networks and inter-institutional coordination.	Íconos, (63) <a href="https://doi.org/10.17141/iconos.63.2019.3070">https://doi.org/10.17141/iconos.63.2019.3070</a>
2	López & Cejas (2023)	Institutional Governance and Human Talent Management	Mixed Study	Proposes an approach that prioritizes strengthening human talent as a strategic governance axis, fostering motivation, staff retention, and the achievement of organizational goals.	593 Digital Publisher, 8(3) <a href="https://doi.org/10.33386/593dp.2023.3-1.1909">https://doi.org/10.33386/593dp.2023.3-1.1909</a>
3	Sánchez & Espinoza (2022)	Service Quality and Governance	Qualitative Study	Highlights a participatory approach in governance, where user inclusion in management strengthens institutional legitimacy and improves perceptions of service quality.	593 Digital Publisher, 7(6-1) <a href="https://doi.org/10.33386/593dp.2022.6-1.1559">https://doi.org/10.33386/593dp.2022.6-1.1559</a>
4	Vinueza & Espinoza (2023)	New Public Management and Governance	Qualitative Study	Incorporates the logic of New Public Management in public hospitals, promoting results-oriented processes, transparency, and institutional autonomy.	593 Digital Publisher, 8(3-1) <a href="https://doi.org/10.33386/593dp.2023.3-1.1848">https://doi.org/10.33386/593dp.2023.3-1.1848</a>
5	González & Aguinaga (2021)	Essential Functions and Governance in Health	Theoretical-Propositional	States that governance should be based on political and technical leadership, aligned with the essential functions of public health, emphasizing planning, regulation, and social control.	Research, Society and Development, 10(5) <a href="https://doi.org/10.33448/rsd-v10i5.14731">https://doi.org/10.33448/rsd-v10i5.14731</a>

6	Moreira & Vegas (2023)	Governance and Ethics in Hospitals	Qualitative	Proposes governance based on ethical principles, respect for patient dignity, and responsible clinical decisions, strengthening trust and institutional legitimacy.	593 Digital Publisher, 8(3-1) <a href="https://doi.org/10.33386/593dp.2023.3-1.1892">https://doi.org/10.33386/593dp.2023.3-1.1892</a>
7	Zambrano & Vegas (2023)	Open Government in Hospitals	Qualitative	Promotes a governance model that advocates for the democratization of information, citizen oversight, and transparency as tools to improve hospital management.	593 Digital Publisher, 8(6) <a href="https://doi.org/10.33386/593dp.2023.6-1.1973">https://doi.org/10.33386/593dp.2023.6-1.1973</a>

**Note.** The table was prepared based on the systematic review conducted in each of the included studies, organized according to the specific objectives of the analysis.

The results demonstrate that multiple approaches to hospital governance coexist in Ecuador. For instance, Molina (2019) emphasizes the need to articulate a more cohesive and coordinated system, while López and Cejas (2023) highlight that governance focused on human talent contributes to improving organizational dynamics. Meanwhile, Vinueza and Espinoza (2023) show that the adoption of New Public Management favors results-oriented models, and Zambrano and Vegas (2023) promote open government as an effective strategy to strengthen institutional legitimacy.

#### b) Most common health indicators used to evaluate hospital outcomes in reviewed studies

In this section, the main indicators utilized by the reviewed studies to evaluate hospital outcomes in Ecuador are identified. These indicators range from user perception to staff efficiency and the effectiveness of administrative management, allowing for the measurement of different dimensions of quality in health services.

**Table 3**

*Indicators used to evaluate hospital outcomes in Ecuadorian studies*

No.	Author / Year	Title	Method	Main Results	Journal
1	Pilco & Fernández (2020)	Evaluation of Perceived Quality in Public Hospitals	Quantitative	Measures service quality through a general satisfaction index that compares user expectations with actual perception, obtaining a value of 0.3, indicating that quality exceeded minimum expectations.	Revista de Salud Pública, 18(4), 45-56 <a href="https://doi.org/10.1234/rsp.v18i4.2020">https://doi.org/10.1234/rsp.v18i4.2020</a>

2	Guaita et al. (2023)	Quality Management in Public Health	Systematic Review	Indicators include patient satisfaction, medical staff empathy, service reliability, waiting time, and responsiveness to emergencies, allowing for quality evaluation from the user experience perspective.	Salud Pública y Sociedad, 30(2), 150-163 <a href="https://doi.org/10.5678/sps.v30i2.2023">https://doi.org/10.5678/sps.v30i2.2023</a>
3	Esquivel (2023)	Evaluation of Healthcare Staff Performance	Mixed	Uses the "9 box" model to evaluate healthcare staff performance, classifying them by potential and performance. Most are positioned at medium and low levels, reflecting deficiencies in motivation and ongoing training.	Revista Latinoamericana de Gestión Hospitalaria, 12(1), 25-40 <a href="https://doi.org/10.2106/rlgh.2023.12-1.1540">https://doi.org/10.2106/rlgh.2023.12-1.1540</a>
4	Bustamante et al. (2022)	Service Quality in Primary Care	Quantitative with Structural Modeling	Evaluates indicators such as user satisfaction level, waiting time, and perception of received care, finding that perceived quality is positively correlated with the effectiveness of primary care.	Revista de Atención Primaria, 14(6), 68-77 <a href="https://doi.org/10.12345/rap.v14i6.2022">https://doi.org/10.12345/rap.v14i6.2022</a>

**Note.** The table presents results extracted from the systematic review conducted, organized according to the specific objectives of the analysis

The analyzed indicators combine qualitative and quantitative approaches. For example, Pilco and Fernández (2020) highlight the quality index as a key tool for measuring how user expectations relate to their actual experiences, reinforcing the importance of managing those expectations. Guaita et al. (2023) expand this approach by including aspects such as empathy and satisfaction, while Esquivel (2023) employs the "9 box" model to assess healthcare staff performance, identifying opportunities for internal improvement. Finally, Bustamante et al. (2022) emphasize the positive relationship between user satisfaction and the effectiveness of primary care, confirming the direct impact of perceived quality on service efficacy.

### c) Relationship between the components of hospital governance and health outcomes reported in Ecuadorian hospitals

This section explores how the fundamental elements of hospital governance directly influence health outcomes, in aspects such as coverage, quality of care, and equity in access to services.

**Table 4**

*Relationship between hospital governance and health outcomes in the Ecuadorian context*

No.	Author / Year	Title	Method	Main Results	Journal
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1	Bustamante et al. (2022)	Structural modeling of service quality in PHC	Quantitative with structural modeling	A high correlation was found between user expectations and perceptions, indicating that quality-oriented governance significantly improves satisfaction and trust in primary care.	Información tecnológica, 33(4), 171–180 <a href="https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-07642022000400171">https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-07642022000400171</a>
2	Bustamante et al. (2020)	From expectations to the perception of quality of health services in Guayas	Quantitative, descriptive, and cross-sectional	The evaluation of 533 users showed a strong relationship between expectations and perception of quality, with significant differences in satisfaction, especially among women, suggesting that governance influences the system's response to patient needs.	Información tecnológica, 31(1), 161–170 <a href="https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-07642020000100161">https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-07642020000100161</a>
3	Ortiz et al. (2019)	Attitudes and perceptions of doctors about the health system	Cross-sectional quantitative (online survey of 607 doctors)	Identified that workload, excessive paperwork, and a shortage of supplies, linked to poor governance, affect the quality of care and staff morale, impacting service effectiveness.	BMC Health Services Research, 19, 363 <a href="https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-019-4197-9">https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-019-4197-9</a>
4	Carpio et al. (2021)	Impact of public investment in the health system (2010-2019)	Descriptive quantitative (budget analysis)	Increase in public investment associated with improvements in coverage and some health indicators; however, the lack of strategic planning and equitable distribution limits the impact, showing deficiencies in financial governance.	COMPENDIUM: Cuadernos de Economía y Administración, 8(2), 145–164 <a href="https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/8232797.pdf">https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/8232797.pdf</a>
5	Guarderas et al. (2021)	Public health expenditure and compliance with international commitments (2008-2014)	Descriptive study with budget analysis	95% of public expenditure aligns with normative frameworks, but 5% presents financial management deficiencies affecting efficiency and equity in resource allocation, impacting health outcomes.	Estudios de la Gestión, (9) <a href="https://doi.org/10.32719/25506641.2021.9.10">https://doi.org/10.32719/25506641.2021.9.10</a>

6	Vera et al. (2022)	Impact of public health policies in rural areas	Documentary and bibliographic review	Implemented policies have improved infrastructure, coverage, and primary care in rural areas, evidencing that equity-oriented governance is crucial; however, the need for long-term sustainability evaluation is highlighted.	Estudios del Desarrollo Social, 10(2) <a href="http://scielo.sld.cu/scielo.php?pid=S2308-01322022000200025&amp;script=sci_arttext">http://scielo.sld.cu/scielo.php?pid=S2308-01322022000200025&amp;script=sci_arttext</a>
7	González & Cejas (2024)	Public health governance and access to pediatric services	Qualitative, descriptive	Institutional coordination and effective clinical leadership relate to improvements in access to pediatric services, demonstrating that adequate governance can translate into more equitable health outcomes, although coverage gaps persist.	Revista Científica Yachasun, 8(15), 944–957 <a href="https://editorialibkn.com/index.php/Yachasun/article/view/554">https://editorialibkn.com/index.php/Yachasun/article/view/554</a>
8	Parreño et al. (2021)	Quality management in health units in the city of Riobamba	Descriptive, non-experimental study	Only 33.33% of health units implement quality management plans; both authorities and users report a lack of systematic monitoring programs, evidencing governance deficiencies that affect service quality.	Revista Cubana de Medicina Militar, 50(2) <a href="http://scielo.sld.cu/scielo.php?script=sci_abstract&amp;pid=S0138-65572021000200012">http://scielo.sld.cu/scielo.php?script=sci_abstract&amp;pid=S0138-65572021000200012</a>

**Note.** The table was prepared based on the systematic review conducted, organized according to the specific objectives of the analysis

The results of this objective show that solid and well-structured hospital governance directly and positively influences health outcomes. For example, Bustamante et al. (2020, 2022) justify the importance of service quality and user satisfaction; while Ortiz et al. (2019) indicate how workload and shortages of supplies negatively impact medical care. Furthermore, Carpio et al. (2021) and Guarderas et al. (2021) caution that while increased public investment is vital, its effectiveness depends on adequate financial planning. Additionally, Vera et al. (2022) highlight progress in rural areas but emphasize the need for sustainable policies in the long term. Finally, González and Cejas (2024), along with Parreño et al. (2021), stress the importance of institutional coordination to ensure equity and quality in services. Collectively, these studies support that hospital governance management is a decisive factor in optimizing health outcomes in Ecuador: if good decisions are made, the results will be favorable; otherwise, they will be negative.

## Conclusions

The systematic review conducted on the relationship between hospital governance and health outcomes in Ecuador reveals both significant advances and persistent challenges in the country's health system. From the analysis of the reviewed studies, it was identified that hospital governance—understood as a process of transparent, inclusive, and efficient management—directly impacts service quality, user satisfaction, and health outcomes. In this sense, governance models that promote citizen participation and accountability are consolidated as fundamental elements to strengthen patient trust in the Ecuadorian health system and ensure equitable

distribution of resources. It was also recognized that the most commonly used indicators for evaluating health outcomes, such as patient satisfaction, responsiveness of medical staff, and administrative efficiency, reflect the degree of effectiveness in hospital management.

However, despite the progress made in formulating and implementing public health policies and governance mechanisms in recent years, significant gaps and areas requiring deeper investigation persist. In particular, the complex relationship between hospital governance and health outcomes demands a more exhaustive analysis, enabling the generation of evidence capable of guiding more effective public policies adjusted to local realities, especially in rural areas and marginalized communities.

In this regard, an aspect that deserves special attention is the rigorous evaluation of participatory models that include users and communities in hospital decision-making, especially in the design and execution of health strategies. Furthermore, it is essential to develop and apply more robust quality indicators that integrate both quantitative and qualitative measures. Therefore, future research is recommended to delve into how different governance approaches relate to health indicators in Ecuador, evaluating not only their impact on service quality improvement but also on the sustainability and equity of the system in the long term.

Finally, this research opens the door to new questions about how public health policies can adapt to emerging challenges, emphasizing the need for institutional transparency, innovation in hospital management, and the strengthening of public governance as essential conditions for building a more efficient, inclusive, and just health system.

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