Access to health care in an age of austerity: disabled people’s unmet needs in Greece

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Since late 2009, Greece has been dealing with the effects of a debt crisis. The neoliberal principles embedded in the three structural adjustment programmes that the country accepted have required radical cuts in health care funding, which in turn have led to widening inequalities in health. This article focuses on access to health care for people with disabilities in Greece in the context of these structural adjustments. We investigate possible differences in unmet health care needs between people with and without disabilities, using de-identified cross-sectional data from the European Health Interview Survey. The sample included 5400 community-dwelling men and women aged 15 years and over. The results of the logistic regressions showed that people with disabilities report higher unmet health care needs, with cost, transportation, and long waiting lists being significant barriers; experience of all barriers was positively associated with low socio-economic status. These findings suggest that a section of the population who may have higher health care needs face greater barriers in accessing services. Austerity policies impact on access to health care in both direct and indirect ways, producing long-term disadvantage for disabled people. Social policies and comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation might help to address some of the barriers this population faces.