

PNRR Observer

Only few weeks left to apply for the EUR 100 million funds aimed at enhancing the Rural Pharmacies

Executive Summary

Until 30 June 2022, it will be possible to apply for the financial resources that the Ministry for the South and Territorial Cohesion (*Ministero per il Sud e la Coesione Territoriale*) has made available - by means of a notice published on 28 December 2021 (the "Notice") - for enhancing the rural pharmacies, *i.e.* pharmacies located in villages and towns with less than 3,000 inhabitants¹ (the "Rural Pharmacies"). The legislator's wish is to make the Rural Pharmacies facilities capable of providing territorial health services and to cover a broader range of services for the benefit of the population.

The Notice is among the interventions aimed at implementing Mission 5 "*Inclusion and Cohesion*" - Component 3 "*Special interventions for territorial cohesion*" - Investment 1 "*National strategy for inland areas*" - sub-investment 1.2 "*Territorial proximity health facilities*" of the **Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan**, approved by ECOFIN Council Decision 10160/21 of 8 July 2021.

The Ministry for the South and Territorial Cohesion, by means of the Notice, started a selective procedure for the granting of subsidizes for the implementation of several types of interventions, including the reorganisation and implementation of the distribution and storage area for drugs, care of chronic patients, including through home care projects, and the strengthening of telemedicine services.

The total financial availability of the Notice is **EUR 100 million of public contribution**, equally divided between the South and the Centre-North of Italy, and in compliance with the Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan - which sets targets to represent the progress of investments - aims at financing at least 500 Rural Pharmacies by December 2023 and at least 2000 Rural Pharmacies by June 2026.

Applications must be submitted no later than 30 June 2022.

¹ Article 2(4) of Law No 221 of 8 March 1968 on 'Provision for rural pharmacists

I Purpose of the Notice

The Notice defines the terms and conditions for the granting of public subsidies to encourage private individuals to invest in subsidised Rural Pharmacies in order to strengthen their role as health service providers, in particular:

- (i) participating in the integrated home care service;
- (ii) providing second-level services through diagnostic-therapeutic pathways designed for specific pathologies;
- (iii) distribution of drugs that the patient is now forced to collect from the hospital;
- (iv) monitoring patients with electronic records and the pharmaceutical file.

II Eligible Interventions

Pursuant to Article 5 of the Notice, the investments potentially eligible are:

- (i) **optimising the effective dispensing of drugs** by implementing distribution on account carried out by territorial pharmacies, also at patients' homes, instead of direct distribution carried out by hospitals. It also includes the reorganisation and implementation of the distribution area and the storage of drugs and the improvement of monitoring levels of expiry dates, revocations and missing drugs;
- (ii) **participation in taking charge of the chronic patient**, also through home care projects, increasing the rate of patient adherence to pharmacological therapies and monitoring the correct use of drugs. The interaction of the Rural Pharmacy with the Electronic Health File (*Fascicolo sanitario elettronico* - FSE) is envisaged: priority is given to specialist training in patient care, including home care, pharmacovigilance, technological facilities, IT and logistical equipment (licences for monitoring platforms, software, hardware, workstations equipped for teleconsultation, data consultation, FSE consultation);
- (iii) **provision of first- and second-level services**, which can also be provided as part of home care, providing diagnostic and therapeutic pathways for specific pathologies expenses for the rental and/or purchase of telemedicine devices and blood and urine analysers and related assistance / creation of reception areas (reserved spaces, specific furnishings, emergency devices) for the provision of telemedicine services, also at home for frail patients, for whom a referral system must be used at a centre identified in advance, preferably in agreement with hospitals or public facilities.

III Eligible entities

The implementing entities are subsidised Rural Pharmacies, *i.e.* the category of pharmacies covered by Article 2(4) of Law no. 221 of 8 March 1968:

"For municipalities and towns with a population of up to 3,000 inhabitants, municipal administrations are entitled to grant the owners of newly established rural pharmacies, as well as



*dispensaries referred to in the third paragraph of Article 1, suitable premises."*²

However, in order to be able to apply for a grant, these entities must meet, *inter alia*, the following requirements:

- a. be operational and registered in the Companies Register (*Registro delle Imprese*);
- b. be up to date with the payment of social security contributions;
- c. not be subject to order following a previous European Commission decision declaring unlawful and incompatible State aid received and subsequently not repaid or deposited in a blocked account;
- d. not to have benefited from a total amount of *de minimis* aid granted under Regulation (EU) No 1407/2013 or other *de minimis* regulations that would result in exceeding the most favourable ceiling under the relevant applicable *de minimis* framework;
- e. not to have received, for the same expenses covered by the facilities granted under the Notice, other public contributions constituting notified State aid within the meaning of Article 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

IV Financial Endowment

The investment required to achieve the aims of the Notice envisages a co-participation of public and private financing; the public financial endowment available is equal to EUR 100,000,000.00 and aims to finance at least 500 Rural Pharmacies by December 2023 and at least 2000 pharmacies by June 2026. The financial endowment deriving from the use of private capital corresponds to 1/3 of the total investment cost.

The public budget will be equally divided (*i.e.* EUR 50,000,000.00 each) between the following two macro-areas:

- a. **South of Italy:** Abruzzo, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Molise, Apulia, Sardinia and Sicily;
- b. **Centre-North of Italy:** Lazio, Marche, Tuscany, Umbria, Liguria, Lombardy, Piedmont, Valle d'Aosta, Emilia-Romagna, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Trentino-Alto Adige and Veneto.

The public contribution payable for each subsidised rural pharmacy corresponds to 2/3 of the total investment cost and is set at a maximum amount of EUR 44,260.00.

V Submission of proposals, deadlines and selection

In order to benefit from the financial endowment provided for in the Notice, the **application** must be completed by the owner or legal representative of the Rural Pharmacy **no later than 30 June 2022**, via the platform available on the website: <https://farmacierurali.agenziacoesione.gov.it/>. In consideration of the fact that the IT platform is the only way for submitting the application, any applications not entered on the platform that

² Editor's note: The Agenzia per la Coesione Territoriale (Agency for Territorial Cohesion), in its "*clarification of 19 January 2022*", specified that these may be pharmacies located in **hamlets** or **towns** with fewer than 3,000 inhabitants. In a subsequent "*clarification*" dated 10 March 2022, it was also reiterated that the Notice is addressed to subsidised Rural Pharmacies referred to in Article 2, para. 4 of Law no. 221 of 8 March 1968, without specifying the management, thus confirming that also publicly owned pharmacies such as municipal pharmacies managed by the municipality itself, by private individuals or by public companies with an *in-house providing* contract are to be considered beneficiaries.



are transmitted by other means (including by certified e-mail), are not valid and will be deemed as not submitted.

The Agency for Territorial Cohesion (*Agenzia per la Coesione Territoriale*) may extend the date for the submission of applications if by the closing date part of the overall financial endowment is still available and in any other case deemed necessary.

Following the submission of applications, the preliminary investigation phase begins, which is carried out by the Agency for Territorial Cohesion and consists of the following activities:

- (i) verification of the correctness and completeness of the upload of applications on the IT platform;
- (ii) verification of the applicants' eligibility for funding with regard to the characteristics of the proposing entities.

The negative outcome of even one of the verifications referred to in points (i) and (ii) above determines the inadmissibility of the application. At the end of the preliminary investigation phase, the application shall be deemed admissible or inadmissible and, if admissible, the project proposal shall be included in a specific grant decision.

The Agency for Territorial Cohesion shall disburse, in single instalment, the amount established in the measure of admission to the contribution to the bank account of the owner or legal representative of the Rural Pharmacy indicated in the IT platform, following the verifications required by law and upon presentation, within 30 days as of the notification of admission, of the following documentation:

- (i) insurance policy covering the entire amount financed in favour of the Agency for Territorial Cohesion;
- (ii) specification of obligations executed by the owner or legal representative of the Rural Pharmacy;
- (iii) certification by the territorially competent administration proving their classification as part of the same territorially competent administration.

Notably, the beneficiary of the public contribution will remain subject to control by the Agency for Territorial Cohesion and will be required to comply with the monitoring and control requirements specified in the resource allocation measure, failing which the contribution shall be revoked.

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Contact

Marco Cerritelli

Partners - Chiomenti
T. +39 06 46622 318
marco.cerritelli@chiomenti.net

Filippo Brunetti

Partners - Chiomenti
T. +39 02 7215 7625
filippo.brunetti@chiomenti.net

