



BRIDGING THE GAP

Enhancing Equitable Access & Innovation in Colorectal Cancer Care in Italy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Italy has a strong, decentralised healthcare system with regional responsibility for CRC prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up. The country offers organised population-based screening in most regions, widespread access to colonoscopy, and comprehensive treatment options in tertiary cancer centres. However, variations in screening uptake, timeliness of diagnosis, and equitable access to advanced molecular testing and novel therapies remain.

At **Level 4**, Italy's focus is on harmonising quality across regions, expanding precision oncology integration, and strengthening survivorship and palliative pathways to ensure consistent high standards nationwide.

INTRODUCTION

Building on strong regional capacity while addressing variation

Italy's National Health Service guarantees universal coverage, but decentralisation means CRC services vary across regions in uptake, timeliness, and resource allocation. While early detection and treatment infrastructure are well-developed, delays in follow-up, uneven molecular testing adoption, and inconsistent survivorship services are notable gaps.

Moving to Level 5 will require stronger national coordination, uniform standards, and systematic integration of innovation into clinical practice.





COLORECTAL CANCER IN ITALY

Current Landscape and Strategic Gaps

| Pillar | Current Status | Strength | Policy Action |
|---|--|---|--|
| Early Detection & Diagnosis | Organised FOBT/FIT-based screening in most regions, but participation rates range widely (40–70%); follow-up colonoscopy delays in some areas. | National programme framework, established referral pathways. | Standardise screening quality metrics, target underperforming regions, reduce wait times for diagnostic colonoscopy. |
| Biomarker & Molecular Testing | MSI/MMR, RAS, BRAF routinely available in tertiary centres; NGS access growing but inconsistent across regions. | Skilled pathology and molecular labs in major hospitals. | Mandate equitable access to molecular testing nationwide; integrate results into regional cancer registries. |
| Treatment Access | Advanced surgical, radiotherapy, and systemic therapy capabilities across most regions; disparities in availability of novel targeted and immunotherapies. | Universal coverage, comprehensive cancer centres. | Ensure rapid approval and reimbursement of novel agents; create pathways for equitable access in all regions. |
| Clinical Guidelines & Quality Standards | National guidelines exist, but adherence and quality monitoring vary regionally. | National oncology societies and working groups. | Implement nationwide clinical audit programmes; link adherence to funding incentives. |
| Palliative & Survivorship Care | Palliative care well-developed in parts of the country; survivorship services patchy and mainly hospital-based. | Legislative framework for palliative care; oncology rehab in certain centres. | Expand community-based survivorship clinics; ensure early palliative integration across all regions. |



CONCLUSION & Call to Action

Italy's CRC system is well-established, with strong infrastructure and expertise, but disparities in screening, molecular diagnostics, and access to innovation persist. Strengthening national coordination, setting uniform performance targets, and ensuring equitable distribution of advanced services will be key to moving towards Level 5 maturity.



KEY POLICY PRIORITIES

- 1 Harmonise screening performance** — improve participation and follow-up timelines in lower-performing regions.
- 2 Guarantee equitable molecular testing** — standardise availability and reimbursement across the country.
- 3 Accelerate access to innovation** — streamline approval and procurement processes for new therapies.
- 4 Strengthen national quality oversight** — monitor guideline adherence and clinical outcomes regionally.
- 5 Expand survivorship and palliative services** — make rehabilitation and supportive care accessible beyond hospital hubs.

CONCLUSION

Italy's colorectal cancer care is strong but uneven. With targeted policy reforms aimed at equity, speed, and innovation integration, the country can advance from Level 4 to a fully mature Level 5 system, delivering consistently excellent outcomes for all patients regardless of region.