The Italian welfare system has been identified as a ‘familistic’ system since the family is mainly responsible for taking care of its members in times of vulnerability. This situation seems to be a problem, not only because of the financial, social and psycho-social costs borne by families, but also because care work may be provided by the various caregivers with insufficient competence. As such, public services should foster family participation in their care-assistance plan, enhance their competences, and sustain them at an emotional level. This approach widens the notions of the ‘expert patient’. It is the family that should become competent and involved as much as possible in the care processes. One way to achieve this aim is by implementing a programme of Family Learning for people with long-term conditions. This has been the object of an innovative feasibility study conducted in 2008 in a region of central Italy. This study explored whether families are actually ready to take on the self-management of long-term conditions and which surrounding conditions are necessary to manage them.

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