Introduction

Driven by broad shifts in demographics and disease status, age-related chronic and complex medical conditions account for the largest share of healthcare budgets in Europe. People living with multiple health and social care needs often experience a highly fragmented service, leading to the inefficient use of scarce resources and resulting in care experiences and outcomes for service users that are not as good as they should be. To address this, policies to encourage the integration of health and social care have grown across Europe; yet, evidence suggests that many such initiatives have not achieved their objectives and/or failed to grow beyond local and context-specific projects. Approaches to health and social care integration, therefore, have yet to make a significant difference in overcoming the silo-based and medically and institutionally based models of care that predominate.

The ability to support people to live better and more independently at home with complex needs requires a step-change in thinking and a systematic response that aligns top-down strategies for integration (such as reform to financial flows and governance) with bottom-up processes that seek to integrate the work of care professionals (such as multidisciplinary homecare teams). Within this reform process, the role of ICT is an essential component to promote the successful operationalisation of integrated health and social care systems. In essence, ICT provides the necessary tools for the functional integration that is necessary to enable data and information to be shared, promote effective communication, and enable inter-professional working. Yet, there remains limited evidence on how best to develop integrated care in practice. The ambition of this book to promote how ICT-enabled integrated care may be achieved in practice is therefore an initiative to be welcomed.

Nick Goodwin
International Foundation for Integrated Care, The Netherlands