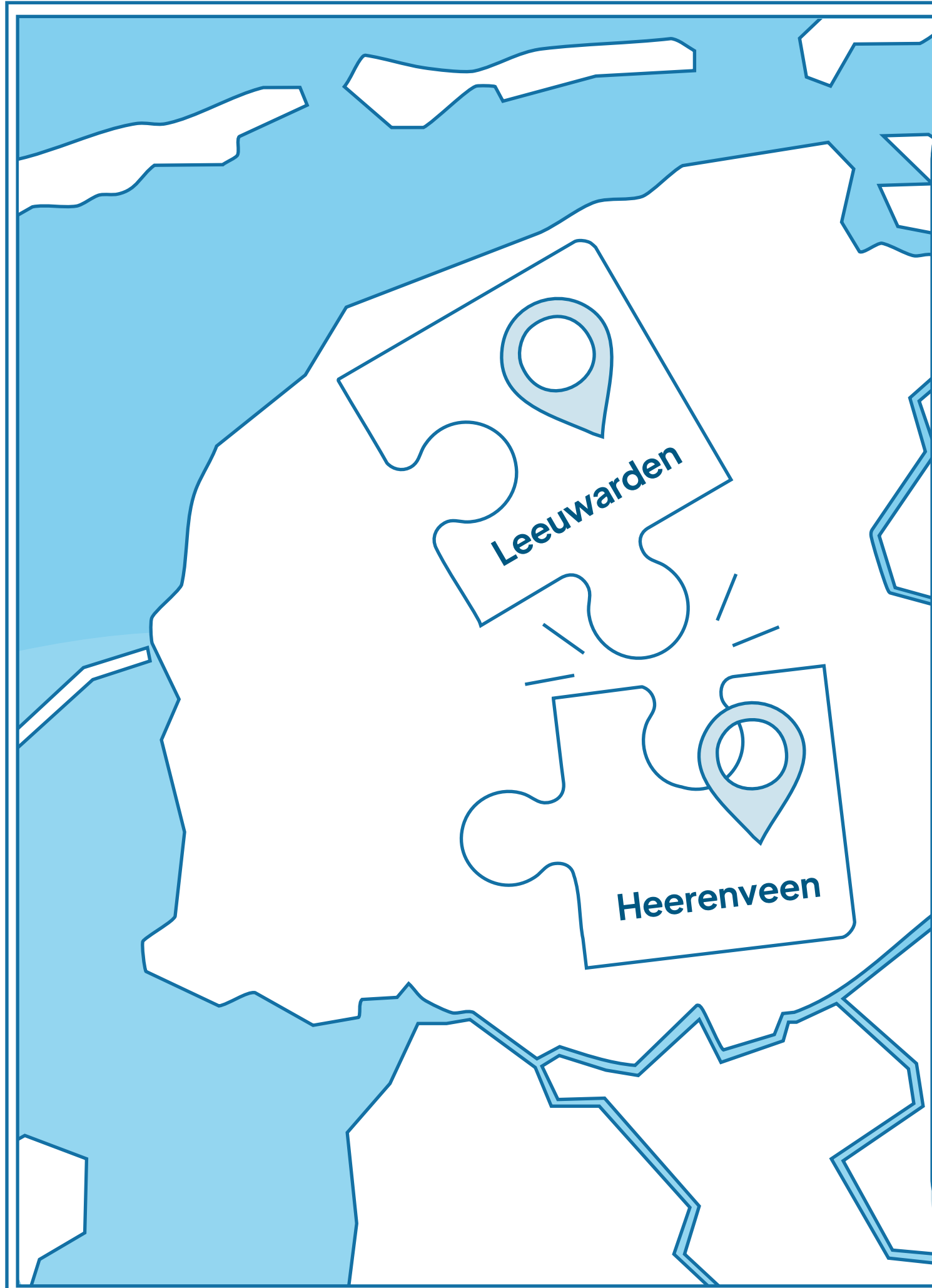



From participation to empowerment: Building Nursing Governance in Frisius MC



About Frisius MC and our merge



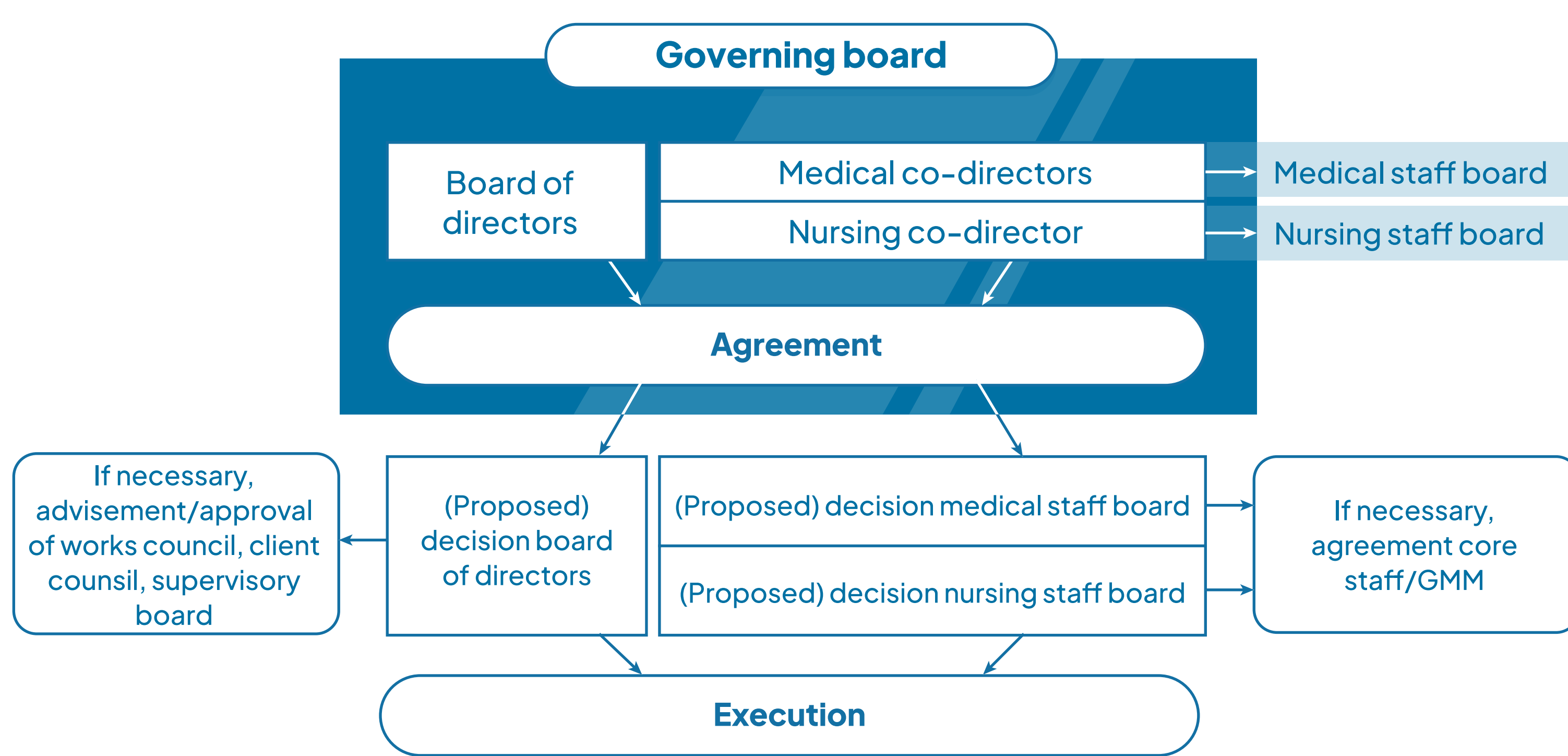
Frisius MC, is a top clinical hospital formed through the merger of two hospitals in the northern part of the Netherlands, each with its own distinct nursing culture, governance approach and organisational structure. The merger created a unique opportunity to address shared challenges: increasing staff shortages, rapid digitalization and the growing complexity of care all required a stronger professional voice and shared leadership.

Nursing Governance is the structural and professional positioning of nurses to influence practice, development and decision-making at all organisational levels.

Strengthening nursing influence is essential to improve job satisfaction and retention, to increase professional ownership over nursing practice and development, and to safeguard the quality and consistency of nursing-sensitive outcomes. Within the organisation, nurses clearly expressed the need for greater autonomy and influence over their own professional work. Limited involvement in decision making affects their engagement, sense of ownership, and work experience. Therefore, enhancing professional governance became a necessary step to ensure that nurses can contribute more effectively to high quality, patient centred, and sustainable healthcare.

Role differentiation, implemented at the operational level based on educational background, created clear differences in responsibilities and expertise within nursing teams. This structure strengthened autonomy, ownership and influence on the ward, forming an essential foundation for effective participation in the wider governance model. Each role is essential and contributes equally to high quality patient care.

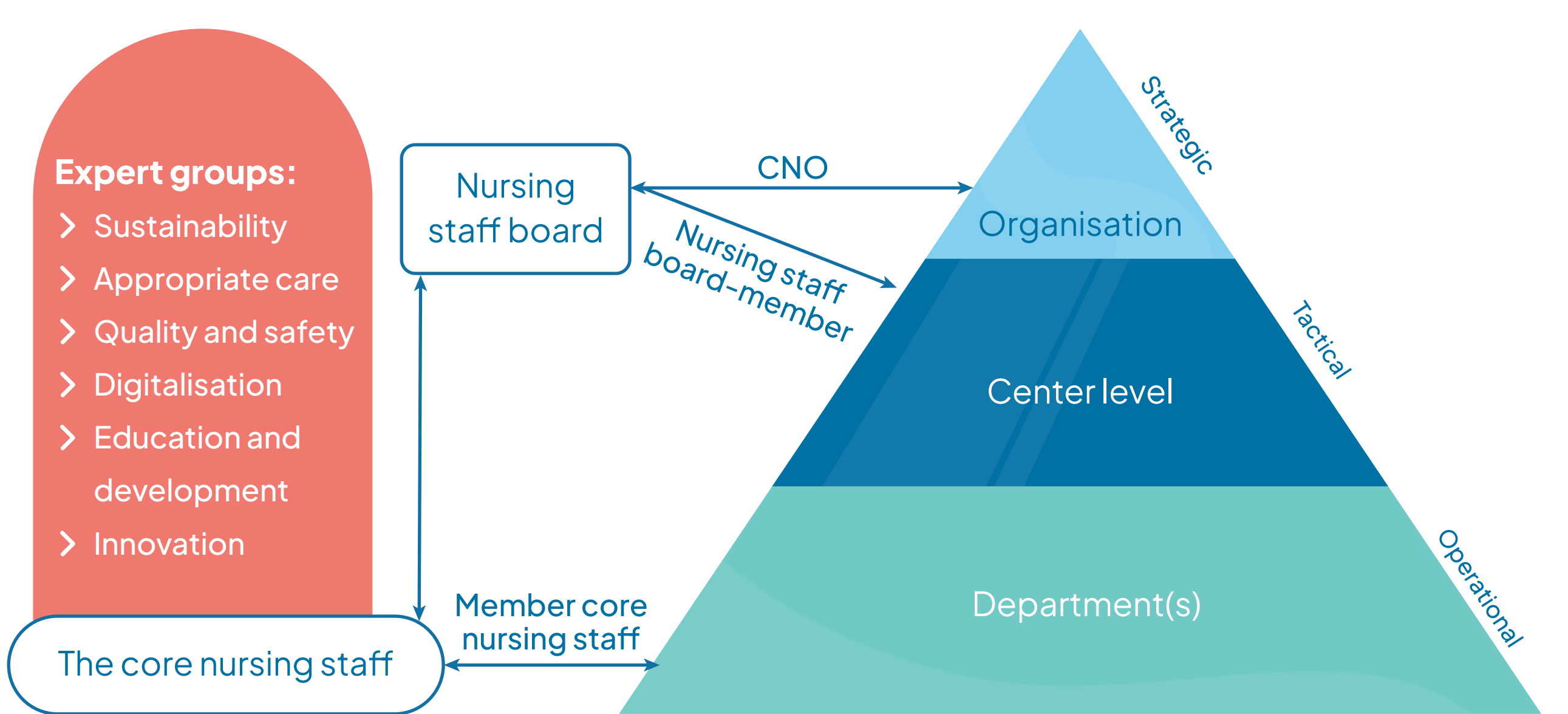
Frisius MC developed a joint governance structure in which the medical, nursing and business domains are evenly represented and make decisions together. At the strategic level, this shared leadership is formalized through the governing board, where the Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) participates as a co-director alongside the Board of Directors and medical co-directors. At the tactical and operational levels, shared governance is implemented through tripartite consultations with practicing nurses, medical specialists, and business managers.



The core nursing staff

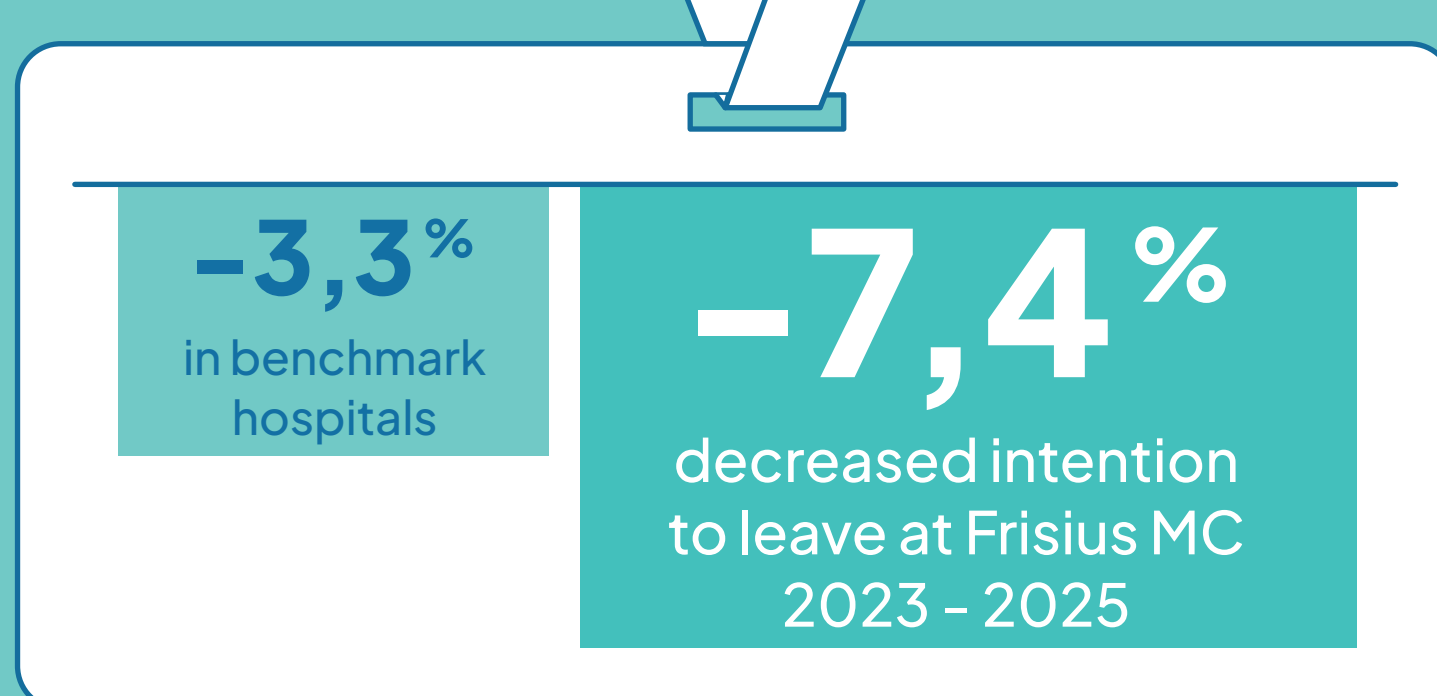
We wanted to strengthen nursing empowerment and governance, with the starting point being the influence of the individual professional and the care team on their own professional development, the content of their work, and the way it is carried out – all rooted in their professional identity. This shift supports autonomy, ownership and professional growth across the organisation.

The core nursing staff plays a central role within this model. It brings approximately 45 nurses from across the organisation, and works through expert groups on organisation-wide themes such as sustainability, appropriate care, quality and safety, digitalisation, education & development, and innovation. This structure ensures both vertical alignment (between departments, centers, and the organisation) and horizontal collaboration across professional groups.

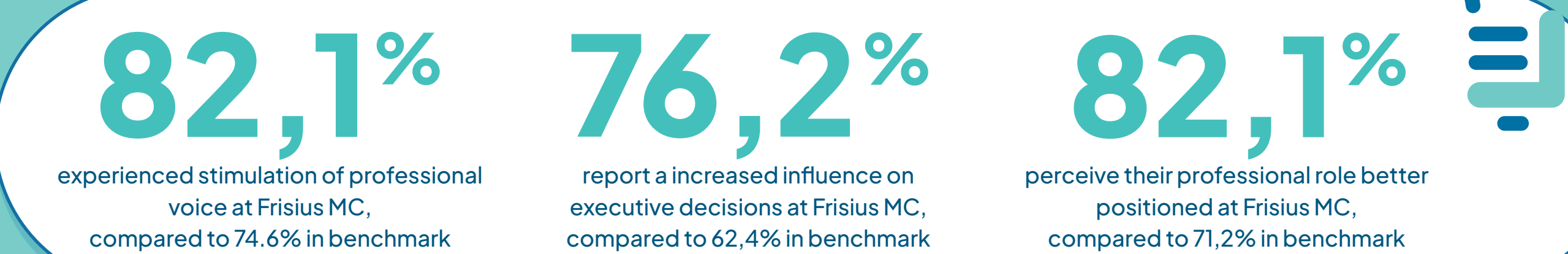


The governance design is anchored in the 2025 'Convenant Bestuursraad', which formalizes joint governance at the strategic level and structures how the Board of Directors, Medical Staff Board and Nursing Staff Board jointly develop, align and assess strategic decisions. The model emphasizes shared responsibility, transparency, and equal partnership between professional groups.

Results so far



The 'monitor zeggenschap', is a nationally used measuring instrument on how healthcare professionals experience autonomy.



The establishment of the Nursing Staff Board strengthens the influence of nurses, nurse practitioner, and physician assistants at both strategic and tactical levels. Empowerment is not a goal in itself, but a means to achieve better care, engaged professionals and a future-proof organisation.

Overall, the organisation is transitioning from participation to genuine empowerment, from operational input to strategic influence. This evolution reflects a shift from carrying out tasks to safeguarding processes, and from simply executing assignments to taking ownership as commissioners of change. The model runs parallel to medical governance, ensuring equal partnership between professional domains.

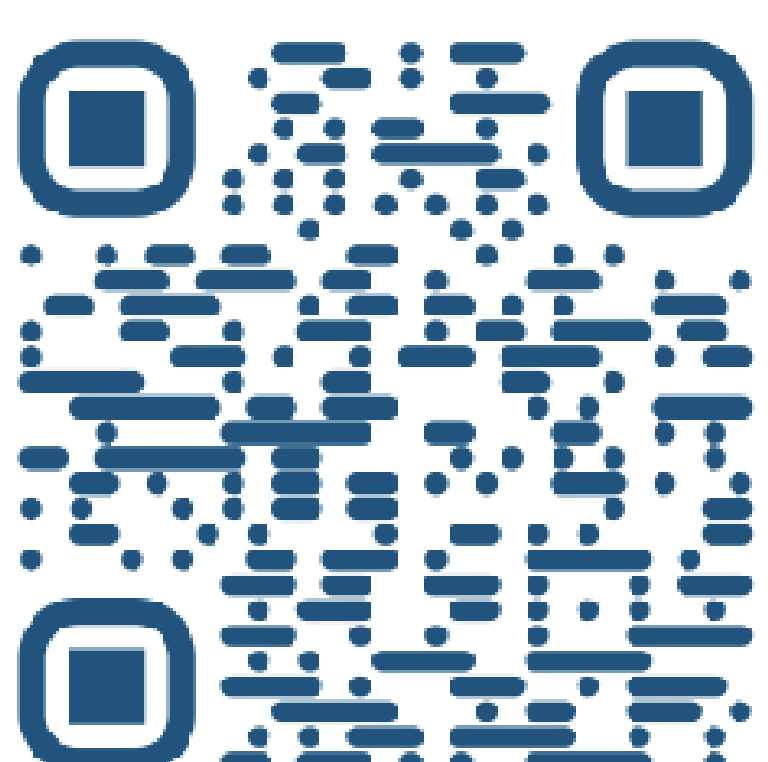
Lessons learned

Working visits to other hospitals, attended by the director, medical co-director and board secretary, proved highly valuable. Director-to-director and specialist-to-specialist conversations helped secure early alignment and support. There is no single 'best practice' for building governance, even though that was our initial assumption. **The key is to remain curious:** explore how others do it, gather good practices, and then co-create a governance model that truly fits your own organisation.

The power of this process lies in its **participatory nature**; do it together, involve all stakeholders from the start. Don't just inform but create together. Nurses, medical specialists, managers and support services all contributed to shaping the design. This requires participation, shared ownership, and a willingness to give and take, aiming for sustainable win-win solutions.

Throughout the process, transparent communication, structured feedback loops, and shared reflection moments strengthened collective ownership. **Early role clarification and formal anchoring of joint and shared governance structures (governing board, nursing co-director and core nursing staff) were essential**, as was investment in leadership development for nurses stepping into these roles.

A key lesson is that not every nurse wants or is ready for a new role, and this must be accepted. **Uncertainty and role ambiguity are part of the transition.** Building professional governance requires time, trust, space to learn, and a cultural shift from participation to strategic ownership.



The experience of Frisius MC shows that nursing governance can be successfully transformed when it is co-created strategically anchored and positioned alongside medical governance. Strengthening nursing autonomy and professional influence enhances ownership, reduces intention to leave, and supports the delivery of high-quality, sustainable care. Empowerment is not a goal in itself; it is the mechanism through which nurses can contribute more effectively to a future-proof healthcare system, both within and beyond hospital.