



Health promotion

GOVERNMENT POLICY PROGRAMME

HEALTH PAYS OFF
- act now



MINISTRY OF
SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND HEALTH

Join us to create a better future for yourself, for your nearest and dearest, and for your community!

Health is one of the most important values in human life and an essential part of well-being. The policy programme invites all Finnish municipalities, hospital districts, organizations, businesses, workplaces and citizens - every one of us - to join together to promote health.

The considerable costs of health care services, absences from work due to illness and early retirement can be controlled by addressing the underlying causes of major public health diseases. This will also improve the general public health status of the population and reduce health inequalities.

The purpose of the policy programme for health promotion is to ensure that:

- all municipalities agree on health and well-being promotion targets and measures and monitor their implementation
- the built environment, traffic arrangements, walkways and cycle paths, schoolyards and neighbourhood recreation facilities are developed so that all citizens can move about safely and without hindrance
- child health care clinics, schools, health care centres and occupational health care all support healthier lifestyles: less obesity, more exercise, healthier food, no smoking and no more than moderate alcohol use
- everyone has the right and the opportunity to participate, to be a community member and to pursue leisure interests

Promote health - improve your community's potential for prosperity

The senior management of each municipality is responsible for decisions concerning well-being and health and for leadership in health promotion. The ongoing municipal and service structure reform provides an excellent opportunity for boosting health-promotion structures. Responsibility rests with those who wield the powers for creating health-promoting solutions that transcend administrative boundaries.

Prevention of illnesses is many times less expensive than treating them. Putting money into well-being guidance, school health care, recreational services and non-governmental organizations in the field is not an extra cost - it is an investment, which will surely pay off.

- *Many public health problems can be prevented with just small changes in lifestyle.*
- *The employment rate would increase by three percentage points if the loss of work input caused by public health problems could be cut by 20%.*

A healthy employee is a productive employee

It is increasingly important to ensure the working capacity and well-being of employees as the demands of working life are increasing, the population is ageing and the dependency ratio is increasing.

Preventive occupational health care helps employees cope at work and contributes to the healthiness and safety of the workplace community and the working environment. This reduces costs caused by absences due to illness and by employees taking early retirement.

Support for recreational sports at the workplace and outside working hours is money well spent, since it comes back in the form of improved productivity as the working capacity of employees improves. Good leadership, close cooperation between the parties involved and the opportunity for employees to participate also contribute to well-being at work and hence benefit employer and employee alike.

- *More than 7,700 Finns retired on a disability pension because of mental health problems in 2007. The expenditure for disability pensions in that year was EUR 793.8 million.*
- *In 2005, an average of 8.6 days of absence due to illness was recorded per employee. The cost of one day of illness is EUR 200–400. By comparison, occupational health care costs are about EUR 230 per employee per year.*

The built environment affects health

Health care services are not the principal means for promoting health and preventing illness. Good community and traffic design, accessible construction, safe walkways and cycle paths, neighbourhood recreational facilities and jogging paths are all areas which can contribute to a healthier life.

Insufficient exercise is estimated to cost society EUR 300 to 400 million per year in Finland, in the form of the growing incidence of cardiovascular diseases and diabetes.

Accessible environments improve the potential for those with limited functional capacity to continue living at home and moving about in their neighbourhood and in public premises. Services accessible to all contribute to the well-being of the population, reduce the need for providing special services, improve the safety of the living environment and support independence.

Maintenance and lighting on walkways, cycle paths and jogging paths create a safe environment for doing exercise and prevent accidents. Investment in this area produces savings in health care.

- Every year, more than 50,000 Finns injure themselves by slipping and falling.
- More than 7,000 hip fractures are treated in Finland per year. One hip fracture costs EUR 15,000 per year to treat.

The foundation for health is laid already in childhood

Children and adolescents learn the basics of a healthy life from their parents and at school. Healthy eating and exercise habits in the family guide children to make good choices also later in life. Children and adolescents must be taught the skills they need to use health information in their everyday lives.

Schools must provide all children with equal opportunities for exercise and healthy food. Schoolyards must contain a range of safe options for playing and exercise. School lunches must be healthy, and enough time must be reserved for eating. This is all part of health and lifestyle education.

- *The raw material costs for a single school meal are only about EUR 0.80. Would it not be high time to increase it to a minimum of EUR 1.00?*

The media can transmit information on health and healthy lifestyles. The principal media are TV, films and computer games. Parents must protect children and adolescents from coming into contact with harmful violence and the marketing of unhealthy lifestyles in the media. They are also responsible for ensuring that children and adolescents get enough rest and sleep.

School and student health care services are in a key position in promoting the health of children and adolescents. Providing for a sufficient number of school nurses is an investment in the future. Health care at secondary-level vocational education institutions is in particular need of improvement.

- *45% of students in vocational education institutions and 12% of students in upper secondary schools smoke on a daily basis.*

All together now - participation and a sense of community add to well-being

Health, functional capacity, social networks and the possibility of participating are important for all of us. Non-governmental organizations play a significant part in this. They provide peer support, enhance a sense of community and develop new activities. Therefore, organizations should be provided with sufficient potential for doing their work, for instance in the form of affordable office and meeting space.



You can improve your health by making just small changes in your lifestyle

Many diseases can be prevented simply by leading a healthy life. Sufficient exercise, weight control, a healthy diet and not smoking will all add years to your life. Even small changes in your lifestyle can make a difference to your health.

Every year, some 12,000 Finns develop diabetes. It is predicted that there will be 300,000 diabetics in Finland by 2020. Exercise and weight control significantly reduce the risk of developing diabetes. A weight loss of as little as 5% to 10% has a health-improving effect.

- *In 2007, 57% of men and 43% of women in Finland were overweight. If the entire population were of normal weight, the number of cases of Type II diabetes would fall by 40%.*

Quitting smoking is always a good idea. Half of all smokers die prematurely of smoking-related conditions such as cancer or cardiovascular diseases. Smoking-related diseases kill between 4,000 and 6,000 people in Finland every year.

- *Smoking causes 1.2 million days of absence from work due to illness per year.*

Excessive use of alcohol causes considerable harm: your health deteriorates, people near you are distressed, your normal social relationships disappear, and absences from work may lead to you losing your job. Your risk of developing cardiovascular diseases, liver disorders, mental health problems and cancer increases. Excessive use of alcohol also contributes to accidental deaths. Every year, some 3,000 people die of alcohol-related causes in Finland.

- *The immediate costs to society of the adverse effects of alcohol are EUR 600 to 800 million per year.*

Further information:
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Brochures 2008:4eng

ISSN 1236-2123

ISBN 978-952-00-2613-4

ISBN 978-952-00-2614-1 (PDF)

