



*Government resolution
to secure the future of social services*

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Government resolution

to secure the future of social services

**GOVERNMENT RESOLUTION
TO SECURE THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

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GOVERNMENT RESOLUTION TO SECURE THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL SERVICES

According to the Finnish Constitution, the public sector must provide adequate social welfare and health care services for all citizens as prescribed in detail by law and to promote the health of the population. All individuals who are not able to provide themselves with the conditions to live their lives in human dignity are entitled to adequate subsistence and care. The local authorities carry the primary responsibility for the arrangement of social services and social assistance for their residents. Central government is responsible for steering the social welfare sector and providing appropriate operating conditions, and for certain income security benefits.

The operating environment of the social welfare sector has changed significantly over the past few years. The key changes affecting the sector include reduced fertility rate, the ageing population and the country's internal migration, internationalization, together with the unstable prospects for the municipal economy and for the public economy as a whole. As a result of the rapid migration that continued throughout the 1990s, regional differences in skills and welfare have increased. The changes in the population structure and the divergence of the municipal age structure that loom ahead require new service models. Caring for the population's social and financial security, ensuring equality and equal opportunities for all, maintaining social cohesion and unity, along with the reinforcement of people's participation, knowledge and abilities in a changed operating environment set new challenges for the entire service system of the welfare society.

The maintenance of a comprehensive public welfare obligation requires both prioritization and focus on citizens' own responsibilities. Finnish membership of the EU requires adjustment to common strategies in many social policy issues as it does in other areas. For the maintenance and development of work and functional ability, and the promotion of personal responsibility and activeness, the social service system must operate efficiently and support individuals' abilities to cope. In developing services more emphasis should be placed on the modernization of the entire social service system. The problem areas include division of labour and coordination, maintenance and development of the professional skills of the staff and improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness of the services. The focus centres increasingly on taking into account people's individual needs and activeness and supporting people in efforts to maintain their work ability. This requires flexibility, innovation and networking from the service system. One example of this is the service centres mentioned in the government's employment policy programme.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health set up a National Development Project for Social Services on October 3, 2002 to report on how to revise and reform the current system of preventive measures and social services for it to

support the welfare of the population and reduce social exclusion and the emergence and accumulation of social problems.

In accordance with the Government programme, social welfare and health care policy must be developed side by side and with parallel aims. The Government made a Resolution on April 11, 2002 to secure the future of health care services. The Resolution to secure the future of social services will strengthen the principles and measures with which social welfare will be developed over the next few years. In ensuring the balanced development of social services, the resolution also supports the implementation of the resolution on the health care services. Better coordination between the social welfare and health care services and the appropriate development of the division of labour between the two will help to create service chains and entities that meet the needs of their users. Better coordination will also improve effective use of the economic resources of central and local government and of service users.

On the basis of the proposal for the National Development Project for Social Services published on March 25, 2003 and the Government programme, the Government has decided on the following measures to secure the development of social services:

1. To secure access to services and service quality

From the point of view of citizens the most important development target is to secure access to services. Other aims over the next few years will include improvement of client orientation and service quality. In a service situation, clients' wishes and individual needs will be taken into account and their chances of participating and influencing the planning and implementation of their services will be improved. Availability of social services in Swedish and Sami-language will be improved. Access to services will be improved by providing the criteria for the minimum times in which social service clients can expect to have their needs assessed. The first legislative amendments and measures being prepared will affect services for older people and municipal social work. Their enforcement and gradual implementation is scheduled to start in 2005. Extending similar criteria to other services will be surveyed on the basis of the experience gained from the services for older people and social work.

The Government will monitor the effects of the quality recommendations for social services issued in 2001 – 2003 and, if necessary, enforce legislative or other measures to secure their minimum level.

2. Development of service structure and operations

Maintenance and development of work and functional ability, promotion of social security and support for personal coping require correct timing in service provision, flexible structures which support service-mindedness and readiness to respond, even in crisis situations.

Securing services by cooperation

The service system must be based on regionally flexible solutions. Provision of a viable social service package at regional and local level requires close cooperation within and between the social welfare and health care sectors and with the education, housing, labour and transport authorities. Moreover, being able to organize a comprehensive range of services requires closer cooperation between the local authorities, the private sector and the third sector.

The social welfare centres of expertise are to discuss the development needs of the service structure and the various functions involved with the local authorities in the region and draw up annually an action programme for the following year's projects and funding throughout the duration of the National Development Project for Social Services.

Regional plans concerning special services in social welfare will be completed by the end of 2003. The plans will serve as a basis for the development of special services and drawing up the action plan mentioned above.

Revising working practices

Working practices, operational structures and management practices will be reformed so that citizens' individual needs can be taken into account, functional capacity maintained and promoted, and support given for independent coping in a coordinated, flexible way. The new working methods to be introduced are founded on evidence-based and assessed information. A Good Practices programme will be compiled to implement the modernization of social services, the improvement of client service quality, as well as the advancement of vocational skills and the improvement of development efforts. The social welfare sector will introduce flexibly the potential offered by the new information technology.

Strengthening the support and services for families

The range of early childhood education and care services will be increased so that families can choose the service which is the most appropriate to their needs. Support for a child's growth, development and learning coupled with support for parents and families bringing up children and early intervention will be adopted as the new areas of focus in daycare. The development work will be implemented on the basis of the Government Resolution concerning the

national policy definition on early childhood education and care issued on February 28, 2002. The financial standing of families with children will be improved in the manner agreed in the Government programme. Peer support by families with children will be strengthened and the operation of family centres developed.

Child welfare to be regionally coordinated

The aim is to ensure special care and support for children, young persons and their families by creating a regionally coordinated range of psychosocial services and child welfare through improved sub-regional and regional cooperation. Another aim is to ensure the immediacy of help in crisis situations as well, and to enforce the necessary legislative reforms and other measures in accordance with the programme to be compiled for the development of child welfare.

Ensuring friction-free services for older people

Adequate services for older people and continuity of necessary care will be ensured by the creation of regional service chains. The primary aim of the services is to maintain the functional ability of older people and support their coping at home. New methods and working practices will be developed and introduced to promote the functional ability and coping of older people.

Development of services for people with disabilities

Services for people with disabilities will be improved by ensuring equal treatment and a chance for an independent life along with improving their social participation. The Act on Special Care for the Mentally Handicapped and the Services and Assistance for the Disabled Act will be harmonized with the objective of updating these services. Services will be generated for a sufficiently large population base and efficient models will be secured for regional cooperation and division of labour.

Services for substance abusers

The quality recommendations for the care of substance abusers guide the development of these services. The development of the service system focuses on how local authorities and organizations assess the adequacy and effectiveness of services at local and regional level. The special Government strategies for this governmental term for the prevention of the problems caused by alcohol abuse and the measures for the reduction of drugs-related problems are included in the Alcohol Programme and the Drug Policy Action Programme to be completed in 2003.

3. Staff recruitment, skills and improvement of working conditions

The necessary qualifications and professional skills required of social service staff will be secured by revising the relevant regulations on staff competences. The level of education and skills required of social workers will be ensured through necessary legislative action.

The further education and training of social welfare staff will be made mandatory and implemented gradually so that the staff have the right, depending on the nature and quality of their duties, to about 3-10 training days per calendar year. Leadership training in the sector will be planned and implemented together with leadership training in the health care sector. The cost liability for further training rests with the employer.

The aim is to ensure a sufficient number and quality of social welfare staff on the basis of the report by the Committee on Estimation of Labour Demand in Social Welfare and Health Care. Moreover, the local authorities will be ensured sufficient expertise to plan their social welfare system, make preparations for decision-making and carry out the actual decision-making, and evaluate the services.

Division of labour between the various staff groupings in social welfare will be clarified by issuing recommendations for changing the structure of duties in municipal social services to make them more compatible with the needs of clients and staff skills.

4. Welfare 2015 programme

The Development Project for Social Services intends to solve the most urgent development needs in the immediate future, which have been presented above in items 1–3, and to secure the long-term development of the sector. The aim is to anticipate the growing demands generated by changes in the operating environment in order to both prevent social problems and solve them. To this end, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health will initiate the preparation of its Welfare 2015 programme.

The extensive preparatory stage of the programme focuses on finding means with which to improve the impact of early intervention and prevention, enhance people's well-being, social security and income. The programme also seeks models with which community building, housing policy and the requirements of working life could be carried out so that they support a policy which prevents problems and promotes social responsibility. The programme will present solutions for balancing individual coping and community support and examine the position and role of various actors in the social welfare sector in the provision of social services. Existing Finnish and international research and

reports on welfare by various research institutions will also be utilized at the preliminary stage of the programme.

5. Ensuring funding and resources

The measures encompassed by the National Development Project for Social Services will be implemented within the framework of central government finances and the State budget. Central government transfers to the local government will be increased gradually in 2004 – 2007 in accordance with the Government framework decision so that in 2007 the increase will be EUR 398.5 million compared with 2003. Of this increase, EUR 100.5 million will be allocated to the implementation of the aims of the National Development Project for Social Services and EUR 10 million to raise the level of the child home care allowance in 2005. Of the increase, EUR 288.0 million will be allocated to the implementation of the aims of the National Health Care Project. When the increase incorporated in the budget of the current year is taken into account the supplementary resources will total EUR 345 million.

In accordance with the Government framework decision, EUR 50,330,000 in government grants will be allocated for social welfare and health care projects at the municipal level in 2004, the corresponding figure in 2005 will be EUR 54,430,000 and in 2006 and 2007 EUR 55,230,000. Of the grant, EUR 30,000,000 will be used annually for health care development projects in accordance with the Government Resolution to secure the future of health care. In addition, of the appropriation available, government grants will be allocated to projects which support the implementation of the aims of the Development Project for Social Welfare, whose areas of focus will be defined annually in the Government Decree on social welfare and health care resources issued annually in the context of submitting the budget proposal.

An annual grant of EUR 1.5 million will be allocated for the implementation of the National Development Project for Social Services for the period 2004 – 2007.

6. Implementation of the project proposals

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health will form a steering group for the implementation of the National Development Project for Social Services. The Ministry will coordinate the implementation of the project.

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