



## Investing in healthier cities: “insuring” prevention

Organised by World Health Organization Global Coordination Mechanism on NCDs (GCM/NCD)

This session was already the fourth in a series of debates organised by the WHO Geneva Office in Gastein, addressing NCDs and ways of tackling them. This time, the focus was on health promotion and prevention on the local level, also taking into account the national insurers’ point of view.

Armin Fidler, immediate past President, European Health Management Association and former adviser to the World Bank, co-chair of the workshop, highlighted the unique composition of the panel, that gathered together not only representatives of local authorities, but for the first time also included the payer’s perspective. He also drew attention to the context specific differences of the healthy cities topic, with i.e. mega-cities, such as Mexico City or Beijing, facing a different calibre of problems than i.e. European capitals. However, the common challenge remains the same: bringing all relevant stakeholders on board.

### The Austrian journey

Josef Probst, General Director, Main Association of Austrian Social Security Institutions, reflected on the Austrian “master-plan” for health promotion and prevention, the “Gesundheitsziele” (health targets), that successfully brought together both national and local level of government, as well as civil society and other relevant stakeholders. To strengthen and prolong health and healthy life years of the population, ten health targets were developed through various participatory projects.

Probst is particularly proud that nine out of ten goals target health determinants and work through a health-in-all-policies approach. In his opinion, the targets have been successfully established as a framework for orientation within the healthcare system - they are viewed as guiding principles for the ongoing health reform process.

*Ní neart go cur le chéile.  
There is no strength without unity.*

*Des Cahill, Councillor, Cork City, Ireland*



He emphasised that changing the attitude towards organising care when reorganising the health system is crucial. The key component here is to strengthen the role of primary care. Drawing a link to the topic of the workshop – healthy cities and tackling NCDs – strong primary healthcare must, according to Probst, be a part of the community and city strategy for health: We can achieve the targets only by working with local communities.

### **A local example - the role of Cork's City Council**

Local government has limited powers, but it is the local government that is closest to the population, said Des Cahill, Councillor of the city of Cork Ireland. The local council can actually see the people who will be affected by its actions and decisions – which is a unique opportunity to react timely to the needs of the city's population.

Cahill explained in more detail how local governance works in the city of Cork. He stressed that when passing the budget and overseeing the development plan for the next council term of five years, it is crucial to ensure all stakeholders agree collectively on a strategy. Only like this it can be guaranteed that - independent from election results - long-term plans can be implemented, with health and well-being of citizens playing a very important role. He sees the city hall as facilitator for all main stakeholders coming together and working as one unit, which is the key to success.

Promotion of healthy living and education are vital for tackling NCDs in the long-run, according to Cahill. Arguments for investing here go beyond health itself: the better the physical and mental state of the population, the more productive and successful it will become. In his view,

the city hall should empower, allow the city to grow and citizens to participate.

### **A holistic approach – how physicians can make a change**

Julia Tainijoki-Seyer, Medical Adviser, World Medical Association, asked the audience to reflect on their own personal experience of how difficult it is to change one's habits as an adult – which is why it is extremely important to develop healthy lifestyle early on.

Speaking from the health practitioner's point of view, cities play an increasingly important role for creating healthier citizens. Cities also have to face the problem of how to guarantee access to care for rapidly growing populations, while being affected by i.e. shortages in the health workforce. In her opinion, the role of a physician should not be limited to treatment. Physicians, as group that belongs to one of the most respected and trusted in society, should encourage people to be and live healthier – to focus on health promotion and prevention.

Tainijoki-Seyer mentioned a simple communication tool helping physicians to address NCDs. A simple "why?" – question addressed to the patient about the reason or motive behind his or her behaviour can shed some light and direct towards appropriate treatment.

She sees two roles a physician can play:

- 1) Being active in the city planning – by contributing their knowledge and expertise on the health impact of i.e. air pollution, traffic, mobilisation, physical activities, access to care, access to fresh water and tobacco free zones.
- 2) Through direct contact with patients – by encouraging them to change their life-style.

Tainijoki-Seyer acknowledges the challenges physicians are facing, such as the lack of time for a detailed exchange with patients given the average 5-7 minutes per consultation. She suggests looking at reimbursement systems and their adaptation to changing realities and the new requirements these demand from physicians. She emphasised the importance of a collaborative approach and multi-stakeholder understanding when it comes to changing behaviours.

### Health literacy – a German approach

Kai Kolpatzik, Physician and Public health expert, Head Department of Prevention, AOK - Federal Association of German Health Insurances, shared the German story of dealing with low levels of health literacy, and how insurances can contribute to solving the issue. He started out by explaining how the health insurance he represents decided to develop a tool for communicating medical information. The tool includes both easily accessible and understandable information, by using simple linguistic and visual ways of presentation, i.e. text boxes summarising benefits and risks of a medical procedure or a medication. The AOK, together with different scientists, decided to develop a national plan to combat health literacy. The project started in May 2016 and will be completed in February 2018. It has so far produced around 15 recommendations on health systems, promotion and prevention, and chronic diseases. National coordination centres for health are being established to help implement these recommendations and get other players - like local governments - on board.

### Healthy cities – a practical example from Finland

Karolina Mackiewicz, Acting Executive Director, Baltic Region Healthy Cities Association, began with acknowledging the shift in understanding health – from a very narrow view, i.e. visiting a doctor and taking medication, to a much broader one. This broader view is also reflected in the healthy cities platform. Health is approached in a way that includes the global ecosystem, natural and built environment, our activities, local economy, community and lifestyle – all this is interconnected and interdependent.

The healthy cities platform stands for cross-sectoral cooperation, equity, empowerment and sustainable development. Mackiewicz focussed especially on the empowerment aspect, as this, in urban health, means

bringing communities to the centre, and giving citizens the opportunity to participate and co-create their environment and surroundings.

What does this mean in practice? Mackiewicz presented examples of youth organisations engagement in local health promotion from the Finnish city of Turku, giving young people the opportunity to create the city they want to live in. An online tool was created, allowing to submit suggestions, comments, ideas and to participate in the decision-making. There is also an active youth city council that decides on grants for youth projects - an initiative for self-made project funding. A group of a minimum of three teenagers can apply for funding between 100-500€ for any project to co-create their living space. Furthermore, in the area of physical activities the city cooperates with youth sports clubs, who offer and organise after school events.

Mackiewicz emphasised a considerable shift in action – from providing services to creating them together. This gives a great chance to establish something together, shaping the space where youngsters spend their time and teaching them responsibility for their environment.

### Dialogue with the audience

During the discussion part audience touched upon various topics, from possible ways of cooperation with the private sector, the role of the healthy cities in the vaccination through the role and expected contribution from the civil society to the global coordination mechanism for NCDs.

### Working with the private sector - tobacco & food

Josef Probst concentrated on the commercial determinants of health on the Austrian example (tobacco), where, regrettably, in his opinion, there is no real discussion about changing the rule of the games, the framework between private-public sector. The fact that on the political level different types of actors are involved, gives hope, but, as Probst said, to come to an agreement one have to have a common understanding, talk openly about the problems and be through a common learning process.

Kai Kolpatzik presented German efforts on sugar reduction. AOK invited other parties, most notable the food market chain giant Lidl, and together announced a strategy to reduce sugar level in the product that Lidl produces and sells. He also mentioned joint efforts on the voluntary commitment

on the EU level on the conduct on food marketing to children, where it was managed to engage with almost half of the industry representatives to implement the rules of the conduct.

### **Getting all on board**

Julia Tainijoki-Seyer responded to the vaccination and health promotion question, presenting an example how World Medical Association engaged with journalists to get the message about the need of vaccination to the people and debunk harmful myths.

Karolina Mackiewicz mentioned, that sometimes we will find ourselves working with very unusual stakeholder on health promotion – in her case it was an involvement from a Catholic church in one of Polish cities, where a priest got on board to promote the health gains of a HPV vaccination for young girls.

Social insurances would welcome contribution from the public health community in form of knowledge transfer and support, and for the community to speak up and vocalise strongly outstanding issues and problems, to become a partner in lobbying for good change.

All gathered agreed on the need of multi-stakeholder approaches and policy coherence for better health promotion and prevention, to mobilise against NCDs.

Written by Maria Dziubinska



## Speakers and panellists

### Welcome

OLEG CHESTNOV, former Assistant Director-General for Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health, World Health Organization

### Input from

JOSEF PROBST, General Director, Main Association of Austrian Social Security Institutions

DES CAHILL, Councillor, Cork City, Ireland

JULIA TAINIJOKI-SEYER, Medical Adviser, World Medical Association

KAI KOLPATZIK, Physician & Public health expert, Head Department of Prevention, AOK Federal Association, Germany

KAROLINA MACKIEWIOZ, Acting Executive Director, Baltic Region Healthy Cities Association

### Moderation & chair

ARMIN FIDLER, MCI Management Center Innsbruck, Austria /and: immediate past President, European Health Management Association

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