

PRESS POINT

LOCAL HEALTH FOR POLITICS

Thursday 5 October 2017

Today's EHFG press point focused on what is happening at the local political level to improve health, and clearly demonstrated how „health in all politics“ is already a reality in some of Europe's cities. Healthy cities at the EHFG talked about the three C's: community, connection, and creativity. It takes the understanding of local politicians to understand their community, and to understand what is at stake. Then, it takes the ability of local politicians to make connections between health and other areas. Making these connections is a skill you have to develop as a local politician. Finally, creative solutions are needed to completely change the way a city is evolving.

Three cities/region joined the press point:

- Karolina Mackiewicz, Acting Executive Director, Baltic Region Healthy Cities Association – WHO Collaborating Centre for Healthy Cities in the Baltic Region
- Furio Honsell, Mayor of the City of Udine, Italy
- Des Cahill, Local Councillor of Cork City, Ireland

Karolina Mackiewicz, Acting Executive Director, Baltic Region Healthy Cities Association – WHO Collaborating Centre for Healthy Cities in the Baltic Region

“The Healthy Cities Network wants to increase the awareness of local decision-makers that health is important, and that it is everybody's business. Health should be considered in every aspect of decision-making: in transport, sports, education and social issues. It is important to foster capacity building on health advocacy within the administration, if we want to discuss health issues across different departments. The network's aim fits perfectly in the Health in All Politics theme of the EHFG 2017 and it is natural for healthy cities to be involved, because this is exactly what we have been working for over the past 30 years.

Health in cities is a complex matter. How many of us think that lighting in parks is a health concern? But lighting in parks can contribute to increasing people's accessibility of healthy choices and can, in the end, help to improve their health. Small decisions in one area might have a considerable impact on health as well. This connection, and the understanding of this connection, is what Health in All Politics is about. Making this connection visible to everyone is what we work for.”

Furio Honsell, Mayor of the City of Udine, Italy

“My main goal is to brand Udine as a “Healthy City” and to achieve healthy well-being for citizens. This includes the physical, as well as the mental aspect of health. We need to create opportunities for active and healthy ageing, especially when people are confronted with disability. We have to help people to reduce falls – by at least 10-20 % according to the WHO's standard. This means we have to provide training and balance courses for the elderly, as well as walking groups.

The healthy cities vision is also about working on places. Places are not just the settings. Places are the kind of things where people can be empowered, areas where people can feel ownership and belonging, where they can build trust. The healthy city vision can be summarised in five “P’s”: People, Places, Participation, Prosperity and Peace – peace among people and with the environment. We need to work on this horizontally or “from the middle”. Working from the top down and even from bottom up is not enough.”

Des Cahill, Local Councillor of Cork City, Ireland

“We see the benefit of being a healthy city, both from a commercial as well as from a physical and mental perspective. The better our people feel, the more the city will thrive. Cork is also looking to create an environment that encourages learning. Learning is a part of health; it affects mental health. Health is part of every aspect of city life – public transport, sport and food initiatives, as well as urban design.

How well a city is doing in respect to being a healthy city will reflect in every aspect. An increase in the use of public transport, the decrease of unemployment and a high percentage of foreign investment are all signs of success. Being a healthy city must be seen as part of the bigger picture not as an isolated aspect. In Cork, policies are not implemented top-down but they evolve from bottom-up or through horizontal initiatives. Thanks to Public Participation Networks (PPNs), decisions on healthy cities, taken in the City Council, feed right back to the population.”

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact:

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