

Using the Power of Health towards a Full Life

A summary of Östergötland's
Public Health Political Programme 2001-2010



We are Now Strengthening Public Health – You are Part of the Success!

When people are asked what they wish for most in life, many of them put good health first. Not because health guarantees happiness but because it provides the prerequisites for a long life, full of possibilities with a plenitude of experiences- which gives us a sense of satisfaction in our daily lives. At the same time, we so easily forget that health is not something we can take for granted. In the same way that we take care of our possessions so that they will last a long time, we must take active care of our health.

There are today too many people living in such a way so as to wear out the health of both body and soul. We eat more than we need and we do not get enough exercise which can lead to becoming overweight and increase the risk of many diseases. Stress is another present day phenomenon which is affecting an increasing number, often because of a job which demands so much that there is not any space left for family, friends and our own thoughts, or because of a stressful life situation, perhaps with unemployment and financial worries.

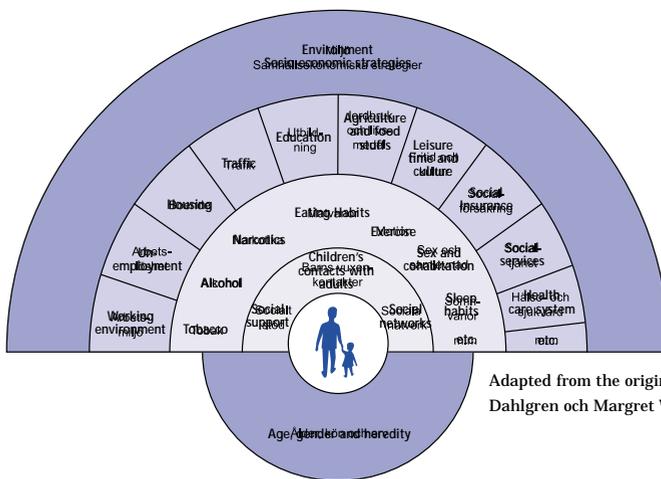
Health is also unfairly distributed in society. In general, men are healthier than women and white collar workers feel better than blue collar workers. For those with a low level of education and low income, the risk of becoming ill is higher than for those with a high level of education and large income. The causes are found amongst other things in different life styles and living conditions.

Everyone bears a great responsibility for his or her own health. But there are also many prerequisites of health upon which we do not have any influence. We are thus also dependent upon the decision makers with regard to schooling, working life, housing, culture, health care, care provision and environment.

In order to improve health in society, it is important to achieve a balance between people's responsibility for their own health and society's responsibility to create a good living environment. Good health is therefore a challenge for us all - with shared responsibility.

Both the Individual and Society Influence Health

Our health is influenced by many factors, which are decided both by us and by society. The figure below shows the interplay between these factors, at different levels, around the person in society.



Adapted from the original of Göran Dahlgren och Margret Whitehead 1991.

Age, gender and heredity are factors which we cannot influence but which give us different opportunities in life. Closest to the individual are the so called psychosocial resources which are built up already during childhood – fellowship, feelings of participation, hope and belief in the future, security and meaningful existence. These characteristics will, to a great extent, influence how we choose our life style, the next level in the figure. Use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs, physical activity, food, sleep, sexual habits are all things which are of importance for our health. Life style and health are also affected by our living conditions, the third level, e.g. if one is or is not employed, what the working environment is like and the risks of suffering violence, accidents and being exposed to poisonous substances in the environment. It is also about how we can live and travel, availability of education and culture as well as how society's health care and care provision function. Farthest out is the structure of society where the fundamental valuations, economical development, division of income, legislation, equality, democracy and integration are important prerequisites for health development. The individual is a part of the ecological system and environmental questions also concern people's health to the highest degree.

Everything we do, small and large, affects our health in one way or another. In the same way our health affects our life situation. This insight, on health's significance for people's well being and society's positive development, is the starting point for our new public health political programme which is called "Östergötland – a Health County".

Östergötland – a Health County

The ultimate goal of a joint public health political programme is to make health promotion the concern of each individual citizen and to strengthen the supporting surroundings – social, physical, economic, cultural and political. The aim of this is to create the prerequisites of and motivation towards better health for the inhabitants of Östergötland and to reduce the differences in health within the county. All people are of equal worth and will have the possibility of influencing their own health in a positive direction. Everyone, irrespective of age, gender, ethnic or social background, has the same right to good health.

When we have succeeded in creating a wide understanding of the power which exists through always thinking and acting in a health promoting way, then we have come a good bit of the way towards realising our vision: Östergötland – a Health County. The public health political programme is the overall strategy for this.

In order to proceed, everyone, both individuals and organisations must have the possibility of acting according to their own situation. But it is equally important to see and utilise the possibilities of cooperation. This presupposes that everyone understands each other and strives towards the same goal. Here the public health political programme will serve as support for politicians and colleagues within the municipalities and county councils, as well as county and voluntary organisations.

Achieving a health friendly society demands political decisions. One of politics' principal tasks of the future is to steer health development in a positive direction, so that everyone can live a life with the best possible health. This means changing the conditions which make people ill and vulnerable as well as increasing people's possibilities of influencing their own situation.

Our society's economic development is dependent upon people's health. Therefore, it pays to invest in health.

Clear Goals for Good Health in all Phases of Life

Our needs and demands change with age, but there are no clear boundaries and people of different ages also influence one another. Health as an adult is established during early childhood, at the same time as children's health is often dependent upon the state of the parents' health.

Goal 1 – Good Growing up Conditions for Children and Adolescents

A healthy start in life is important for the child's own sake but is also an investment for the health of future adults. Children and adolescents need a secure, safe and developmental growth period, free from acts of cruelty, drugs and damaging influence from the environment. They must be given the chance to develop their full physical, psychological and social capabilities as well as the ability to question and make independent choices.

Goal 2 – Good Health and Quality of Life for Adults

For adults it is important to be able to further develop and retain physical, social and psychological capacities. To have employment has significance as a means of support, for a person's identity and social relations. It is important that one's existence is meaningful and manageable, free from violence and accidents and that there is a balance between demands and control. Fellowship and good life habits in a secure environment give quality of life.

Goal 3 – Good Health and Quality of Life when Growing Old

Everyone should be able to grow old in a secure way, be active and be influential in society, be met with respect and retain his or her integrity. Access to good health care and other care provision should go without saying. Friendship, being occupied, cultural experiences and good life habits are important prerequisites of health. To be able to steer one's daily life, make one's own choices and feel secure creates quality of life.

Towards the Goals by Joining Forces

Central to the public health political programme is the *health promoting attitude* which will permeate all areas of work and characterise both political and individual decisions. This means utilising the knowledge and strength which everyone has inside them and giving everyone the possibility of making important decisions from the perspective of their own situation. This means also that people must have the prerequisites to survive life's 'trials and tribulations' by feeling that their existence is meaningful, comprehensible and manageable.

An important task for the municipalities and county councils, in cooperation with others, is to develop *health promoting surroundings* where we are to live, work and spend our leisure time. A good environment strengthens people's commitment and facilitates and encourages good life habits.

Understanding of people's social, economic, ethnic and cultural living conditions is essential in order to be able to *equalise differences in health*. This includes working for equality between different groups and equal opportunities for men and women.

Working towards better health among the inhabitants of Östergötland must include a *combination of measures* directed towards people who run the greatest risk of becoming ill (e.g. treating obesity) and general measures for larger groups of the population (e.g. teaching children the joy of movement and good eating habits).

The public health political programme also describes which tools and methods are needed for successful work towards better health:

Action plans which give the public health programme a tangible content on a local and county level.

Competence development for everyone in order to increase knowledge about health and the factors influencing it.

Collaboration between the county councils and municipalities and with other authorities and organisations.

Follow up, evaluation and revision of the public health project at a pace which keeps up with the rapid development of society.

Health consequence descriptions, result and welfare balance sheets in order to describe how different decisions will affect health and to follow up the public health programme's effects on health in the county.

Towards a more Plentiful Life

Realisation of the public health political programme is a long term project which gives rise to great challenges and presupposes that society's main figures, just as all of us take on this responsibility.

Several Challenges Up to the Year 2005 are:

To put health high up on the political agenda

To make public health questions an integrated part of all areas of work

To develop a common view crossing the working boundaries, i.e. that health and welfare questions are seen as two sides of the same coin.

To create a forum for collaboration within and between organisations

To elect a joint political forum on the county level for continued development and follow up

To give county and voluntary organisations an important role in the public health project

To concretise the joint public health political programme in the form of action plans

To express a health promoting attitude in plans of work

That a health consequence description regularly precedes political decisions

That result balance sheets, with measurement of health and/or its determining factors, are used for follow up within the health care system.

That welfare balance sheets, with measurement of health and/or its determining factors, are used for follow up of municipal work.

That nursery schools, schools, places of work, places of residence and the health care system have becoming health promoting environments as their goal

That municipalities and county councils pay special attention to their own working environments and serve as an example for others

That a variety of cultural and leisure activities is available to everyone

Östergötland – a Health County

The public health political programme has been formed by collaboration between politicians, administrators and experts from the county council and municipalities of Östergötland between the autumn of 1999 and the autumn of 2001. Other participants have contributed through their valuable knowledge and suggestions.

From November 2001 to February 2002, the county council and all the municipalities agreed to adopt the programme. Since then, the work has begun to transform the programme into tangible action plans.

Information on public health, as well as the public health programme as a whole, is given at the county council's website www.lio.se – select "Hälsa och livsstil" (Health and Lifestyle) under the heading "Hälso- och sjukvård" (Health care).

If you would like to know more about the work of the programme and the next steps, you are also welcome to contact the "*politiska styrgruppen*" (political committee -see the website).

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