



Folkhälsomyndigheten
PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY OF SWEDEN

Towards a good and equitable health

A framework for implementing and monitoring the national public health policy



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About this publication

In June 2018, the Swedish Parliament adopted a new national public health policy with a reformulated public health goal and revised target areas. The public health policy has a clearer focus on equitable health with an overarching objective of eliminating avoidable health inequalities within one generation. In May 2019, the Swedish Government commissioned the Public Health Agency of Sweden to develop a framework to enable systematic and coordinated efforts that support the realization of the national public health goal. This includes an oversight of different policy areas as well as determinants and indicators of public health.

In this report, the Public Health Agency of Sweden presents a framework for how the reformulated public health strategy will be implemented. This includes monitoring of both health and the social determinants of health according to eight target areas outlined by Sweden's public health policy. We have identified relevant national policies and agencies, as well as appropriate indicators to monitor public health developments.

Public health work needs to be strengthened and prioritized in order to eliminate avoidable health inequalities and to build sustainable societies. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for long-term, health-promoting, and preventative cross-sectoral public health work. To meet the citizens' and society's needs, the Public Health Agency of Sweden needs to foster deeper collaborations with other national agencies, county councils, and municipalities who are responsible for many of the services that have an impact on the public's long and short-term health.

We would particularly like to thank all organizations and persons who have participated in dialogues and provided invaluable contributions and feedback.

The Public Health Agency of Sweden

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Glossary

Health equity – The absence of unfair and unavoidable or remediable differences in health among population groups defined socially, economically, demographically, or geographically. In contrast, health inequity exists where systematic differences in health are judged to be avoidable by reasonable actions (1, 2).

Health inequalities – Measuring and monitoring health inequalities shows objective differences in health. Observed differences are not explicitly the results of inequities but can be used as a means to evaluate them (3).

Social determinants of health – The non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. These are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life. These forces and systems include economic policies and systems, development agendas, social norms, social policies, and political systems. Together, the structural determinants and conditions of daily life constitute the social determinants of health and are responsible for a major part of health inequities between and within countries (3, 4).

Civil society – An arena separate from the state, the market, and individual households where people, groups, and organizations act together in common interests. Civil society actors include non-profit organizations, foundations, and registered faith communities as well as networks and campaigns. Civil society actors may conduct economic activities but do not distribute profits to members, owners, or other people; instead, profits are fed back into the operations (5).

Introduction

From an international perspective, public health in Sweden ranks highly and is largely improving. However, disparities in health, as well as in the social determinants for good and equitable health, remain.

Consequently, in 2015 The Swedish Government appointed a national Commission for Equity in Health tasked with proposing measures that might contribute to a reduction in avoidable health inequalities. In June 2017, the Commission presented its final proposal (6). In April 2018, the Government presented the bill entitled *Good and equitable health – an advanced public health policy* (prop. 2017/18:249) to Parliament. The bill emphasized the following:

- Health inequity is a societal problem and hampers sustainable development
- Public health is a shared responsibility for all sectors at all levels, requiring actions by public and private sectors, as well as civil society and individuals. All sectors should endeavour to promote good and equitable health
- Health in all policies should guide work in all sectors at the local, regional, and national levels
- Collaboration at the national level can facilitate public health work at regional and local levels

The bill also highlighted the need for extensive monitoring of public health and social determinants of health, as well as evaluation of public health work with a greater focus on disparities in health among different groups in the population.

The national public health policy

In June 2018, the Parliament endorsed the national public health policy with the reformulated overarching goal and a revised list of target areas. The policy contains eight target areas, an update from what was previously eleven target areas:

1. Conditions in early life
2. Knowledge, skills, and education/training
3. Work, working conditions, and work environment
4. Income and economic resources
5. Housing and neighbourhood conditions
6. Health behaviours
7. Control, influence, and participation
8. Equitable and health-promoting health and medical services

Figure 1 The eight target areas of the public health policy



Each target area describes the most important factors affecting people's health, highlighting the social determinants of health and a life-course perspective. The national public health policy emphasizes the need for long-term, goal-oriented, and cross-sectoral work at all levels of society in order to achieve good and equitable health for all.

A framework for implementing and monitoring the national public health policy

The Government commissioned the Public Health Agency of Sweden to develop a framework to enable systematic and coordinated efforts that support the realization of the reformulated public health goal. This included reviewing different policy areas and agencies, as well as indicators of health and social determinants of health. In this report we present a framework that identifies relevant national goals, agencies, and indicators for monitoring public health developments and work.

The framework builds on the work undertaken by the Swedish Commission for Equity in Health (2015-2017) as well as the national public health goal and the eight target areas of the public health policy.

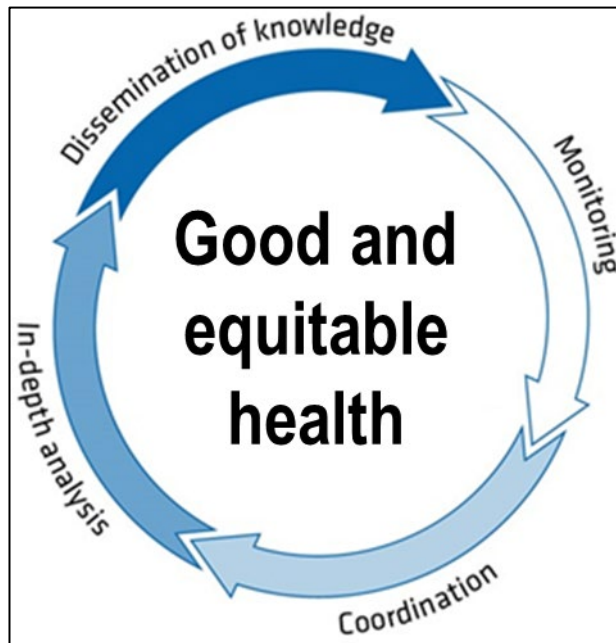
The framework requires systematic and coordinated public health efforts among key stakeholders at the national level. Specifically, it builds on current governance structures and the division of responsibilities between government agencies, as well as the dutiful cooperation between them according to the Government Ordinance and the Public Administration Act.

The framework formalizes the following:

- it clarifies the meaning of the eight target areas of the public health policy
- it identifies indicators for monitoring of both the targets areas and public health status
- it highlights other national policy goals and government agencies relevant to public health work at the national level

The framework comprises (1) monitoring, (2) coordination, (3) in-depth analysis, and (4) dissemination of knowledge. The four parts are inter-connected and driven by the indicator-based monitoring.

Figure 2 Process flow of the framework



Monitoring

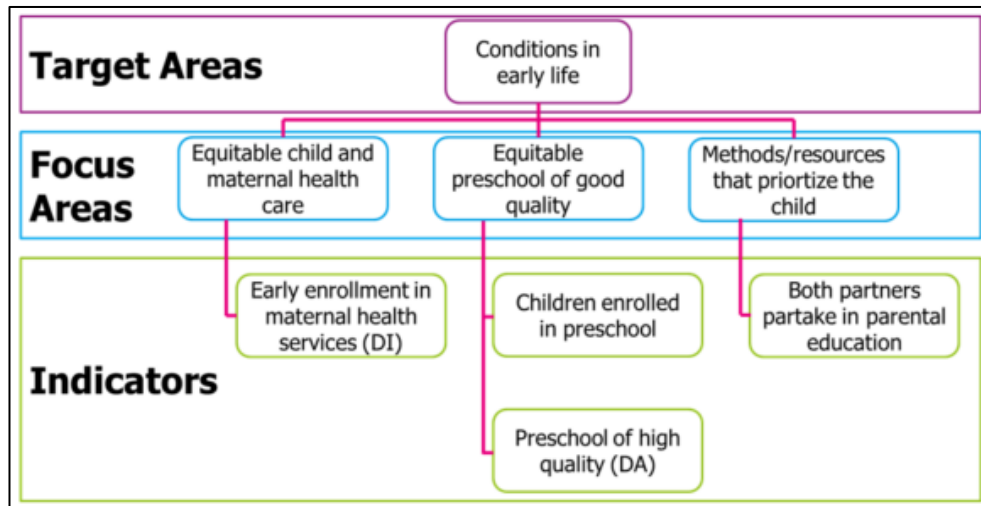
The Public Health Agency of Sweden has identified indicators to be used for monitoring health status and social determinants of health. The aim is to track developments in indicators vital for achieving the public health policy goal. Monitoring will identify areas where further knowledge is required and will highlight actions needed in target areas.

The monitoring is based on indicators within each of the eight target areas identified by the public health policy, as well as a set of health indicators not included within the target areas. A set of core indicators will be used to monitor health inequalities, and a wider set of indicators will be used to monitor social determinants of health, as well as the health status of the population using a life-course perspective. A full list of these indicators can be found in *Attachment 1 - Indicators to be used for monitoring health status and social determinants of health* on the Agency's website.

Each target area is comprised of several focus areas within which several indicators have been selected. The Public Health Agency has prioritized indicators used in official statistics, other national indicator-based monitoring systems, and relevant United Nations Sustainable Development Goals indicators. However, some gaps remain where there are currently no established data sources with regular data collection or where defined indicators are lacking. Where a data source is missing, a Development Area (DA) has been highlighted that will, in collaboration with other government agencies, be investigated in order to determine whether and how the area will be monitored. If a data source is available but an indicator is not currently defined, a Development Indicator (DI) has been identified. This means

that development indicators are relevant, scientifically valid, and can be influenced, but that they need to be made measurable.

Figure 3 Example of the structure of the indicator-based monitoring in the target area Conditions in early life



The Public Health Agency of Sweden will publish results from the monitoring through the following channels:

- Annual reporting of key public health developments
- An online database with all indicators
- Fact sheets for each core indicator
- Automated fact sheets specific to each county and municipality
- User-friendly support material

Coordination

Because cross-sectoral collaboration is a key feature of the public health policy, public health work must be coordinated so that government agencies, county councils, municipalities, and other stakeholders can exchange knowledge and share in the responsibility in achieving the goal of good and equitable health.

Government agencies should work to improve and strengthen collaborations in order to identify areas where additional knowledge and action is needed. Therefore, a joint, strategic dialogue between national agencies is vital to the state's public health work. These dialogues will be based on the monitored indicators with the objective of identifying needs and priorities for continued collaboration.

Today, various forums exist for dialogue on specific issues between the Public Health Agency and other stakeholders. However, this channel of communication needs to be further formalized to include regional and local stakeholders. The reformulated public health goal proposes implementing forums for the exchange of experiences and information between all relevant stakeholders.

In-depth analysis

In-depth analysis aims to better understand factors that influence public health, current challenges within public health, and how these impact health inequalities. Both indicator-based monitoring and dialogues with various stakeholders will assist in identifying areas for further in-depth analysis. These analyses will be carried out jointly between government agencies in order to contribute to an increased understanding of different subject areas and to find solutions to improve the prerequisites for good and equitable health. This will result in collaborative reports across national agencies containing relevant information for practitioners.

Dissemination of knowledge

Dissemination of knowledge is a vital part of the public health strategy. With joint work among government agencies, knowledge can be disseminated in other non-traditional channels in a more coherent and relevant manner for end-users. The Public Health Agency of Sweden will utilize digital channels (social media, website, etc.), conferences, and networks to spread this knowledge.

Implementation

The Public Health Agency of Sweden will begin implementing the national framework in 2021. The framework will be continuously revised, taking into account feedback from other stakeholders and developments in public health.

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The Public Health Agency of Sweden is an expert authority with responsibility for public health issues at a national level. The Agency develops and supports activities to promote health, prevent illness and improve preparedness for health threats. Our vision statement: a public health that strengthens the positive development of society.



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