



Regions for Health Network Conference

Reducing health inequalities from a regional perspective

What works, what doesn't work?

8 & 9 November 2010, Genk (Belgium)

www.healthinequalities2010.be

1. Introduction

Health is a valuable asset for everyone. But health surveys reveal a harsh reality: people living in deprived circumstances or people lower down the social scale have a shorter life expectancy. Also in prosperous regions like Flanders (Belgium) people's social position systematically affects their health.

Although policy makers at different levels are aware of the need to eliminate inequalities, they fail to sufficiently close the health gap. This is largely due to the complexity of the problem: the social determinants of health require a cross-sectoral approach, not only at (inter)national level, but also at regional and local level.

As regional policy offers an excellent framework for developing an integrated approach to address the social determinants of health, the Flemish authorities will organise on **8 and 9 November 2010** a two-day international conference, entitled "**Reducing health inequalities from a regional perspective - what works, what does not?**". The conference intends to examine the efficiency of policy measures and initiatives aiming at the elimination or reduction of health inequalities. That is why we will analyse practical experiences and field actions. We will evaluate how research outcomes can best be translated in policy development, especially at regional level.

This conference will be supported by the Regions for Health Network of the World Health Organization (European region) and fits in with the Belgian Presidency of the European Union.

Participation in the conference is **free**, but **registration is required**. You can register online **until October 15, 2010**.

Information and registration on: www.healthinequalities2010.be.

2. Objective

Background

In recent years, attention has increasingly been paid to health inequalities, both at international and at European, national, regional and local levels. This attention is mainly due to the emphasis the World Health Organization has placed on the reduction of disparities in health status.

Responding to increasing concern about persistent and widening health inequities between and within member states, the World Health Organization established the Commission on Social Determinants of Health in 2005 to provide advice on how to bridge the health gap. The Commission's final report was launched in August 2008.



In October 2009 the European Commission published a framework for action on health inequalities "Solidarity in health: reducing health inequalities in the EU".

In April 2010, the Spanish Presidency of the European Union put the theme also on the European agenda. Spain also opened the debate on monitoring social determinants of health, evaluating progress and providing input to research. The Council conclusions of June 2010 emphasize the intention of the EU Member States to focus on combating health inequities.

Building on this momentum, the Flemish authorities and the Regions for Health Network (WHO-EURO) intend to prove the importance of regional and local expertise in eliminating health inequalities and aim to contribute to change in this way. Flanders is looking forward to continuing the debate on the reduction of health inequalities at regional level.

Aim

The conference wants to examine how regional policy and stakeholding sectors can efficiently eliminate disparities in health by addressing the social determinants of health. Central to this are the following questions:

- Which measures work? Which initiatives do not produce any results (and why)? And how can research outcomes be translated into policy and practice?
- Informing policy-makers: What to tell and how to tell it?

During the conference we also want to show that:

- sustainable policy development and specific initiatives to reduce health inequalities can and must be evidence-based;
- an integrated and participative approach is necessary to reduce health inequalities. This requires appropriate methods to communicate and keep attention focused on the topic.

We hope we can encourage all policy areas and levels to pay more attention to the social determinants of health so that structural disparities in health can be avoided or reduced.

3. Programme

The conference is a two-day event with presentations, workshops, panel discussions and poster sessions. We will work towards practice-oriented recommendations to increase the efficiency of policy measures for eliminating health inequalities.

In two plenary sessions held the first day the international context of health inequalities will be outlined.

In the first plenary session, entitled "What works, what does not?" speakers will set the tone for a debate on an evaluation framework for measuring the effectiveness of policy measures to eliminate health inequalities.

In a second plenary session, "Informing policy-makers: What to tell and how to tell it?" we will more deeply investigate the need to tackle injustice and inequalities in health in the distinct policy areas and at all policy levels. Moreover, attention must remain focused on evidence-based initiatives and the evaluation of their implementation. Proof is provided by examples of cross-sectoral initiatives and practical experiences.

The second day is dedicated to an "all hands on deck" approach to health inequalities. A plenary session "From theory to practice" serves as an introduction to the subsequent workshops. During these workshops, examples of practice will be presented for addressing health inequalities among specific target groups.

Currently, WHO and EC have invested in extending the knowledge base on health inequalities, still a proper benchmarking and sharing of good practices over the regions and the European Member States would require more policy and practice oriented research. The debates in the different

workshops will reflect on inequalities across target groups. Statements will be used to open the reflection of participants and panel members on how the regional and local level could move forward and build on what exists. At the end of the day, the presentations and discussions should reflect on how the evidence base on effective ways to tackle inequalities could be used for benchmarking over the EU.

In the afternoon of the second day, an initial step towards a Flemish policy on eliminating health inequalities will be discussed. The aim is to identify the preconditions for a cross-sectoral policy. We will start from an analysis of what has already been done and how this can be improved. We will examine how existing initiatives can be better streamlined so as to establish a policy focusing on avoiding and reducing health inequalities. A first panel will hereby investigate its possible implementation in the framework of local social policy. A second panel will examine the possibility of a "health in all policies" approach to Flemish health objectives.

The working language of the conference will be English. Simultaneous translation Dutch - English will be provided for the plenary sessions.

The afternoon session of the second day ("Aanzet voor een Vlaams beleid rond het wegwerken van gezondheidsongelijkheden" – An initial step towards a Flemish policy on eliminating health inequalities) will be held in Dutch.

4. Information and contact

More information and registration: www.healthinequalities2010.be

Please register before October 15, 2010 !

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