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Health in All Policies

Health is something that is highly valued and respected all around Europe. Health influences the quality of our lives in an essential way. Health is also a competitive factor of success because public health is an important cornerstone of economic, social and human development. Peoples' wellbeing goes hand in hand with their productivity.

Health can be defined in many ways. Health is not just the lack of an illness or the state of wellbeing. It is often seen as a resource for every-day life, not the objective of living. Health is a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources as well as physical capacities. Health concerns everybody. **Therefore** health is everybody's business, not only the health experts'.

During its EU presidency 2006, Finland launched the Health in All Policies approach. According to this approach all policies should take the health impact of decisions into consideration. Health in All Policies means that services other than actual health services can also produce and nourish people's health. The issue is that contributory factors in fields such as the environment, education, housing, traffic and employment can all affect human health to an even greater extent than actual health services.

Public policy can also influence or guide individual's behavior and choices related to **their** lifestyle and health. Determinants of health can often be directly and easily affected by policies in different arenas of political decisions as well as in settings where people live and work.

A good alcohol policy together with other policies will decrease the social cost caused by alcohol and will support the objectives of the international agreements to increase productivity. It will also support the goals of sustainable development by investing in health and by decreasing inequalities in health. A good alcohol policy will demand an improved regulation of the sales and marketing of alcoholic beverages and tax policy that takes health aspects into consideration. A good alcohol policy will support the family and consumer rights policies by diminishing violence in homes. It goes hand in hand with the traffic policy that creates a safe environment by decreasing the number of traffic accidents.

Occupational health is a good example of how health and safety at work, prevention of alcohol related harm and health promotion in the workplace, can play an important part in health improvement and economic growth. People in good health are more productive and more effective at work or studies. They are able to stay longer at work, postpone retirement and relieve the welfare state. Both economic growth and investment in health provide parallel benefits and advantages, which are not to be dealt with as separate issues.

Many decisions dealing with determinants of health are made in other societal sectors than in the health sector. Therefore, the preliminary assessment of health impacts must be done with those actions that influence the determinants of health. The decision-makers

must be aware of the health impacts of the decisions so that the consequences are not directed at those who are already in poor health.

A significant part of different problems and illnesses can be prevented by the methods of health promotion and preventive work. Also these cost money, but they are cheaper than the treatment and rehabilitation in the long run. It is essential that decision-makers and opinion leaders recognize those determinants that can influence health and inequalities in health with international, national and local political decisions.

Conclusions:

Alcohol is a health determinant.

It is important to invest in health for health is not only a cost but also an investment, which will pay its dividends in the future.

Health is a political choice.