Working with Health 2020 in countries[1]

Introduction

Health 2020 is a comprehensive health policy framework to advance health and well-being in countries. It is based on values and evidence and incorporates the latest scientific knowledge available about the state and determinants of health and well-being. It focuses on governance and leadership to deal with today's health problems; determinants across the whole of government and whole of society; the role of the life-course; the importance of delivering better health systems and public health capacity; and the impact of people empowered to play their role through resilient communities and supportive environments.

All European Member States adopted Health 2020. Health 2020 recognizes that countries engage from different starting-points and have different contexts and capacity. National and subnational health policies, strategies and plans need to be aligned with Health 2020 based on strong leadership and explicit commitment to its values and approaches as well as assessment of existing policies and stated goals for health and well-being through the Health 2020 lens.

The challenge of Health 2020

Health 2020 asks everyone interested to think about improving health and well-being in new ways. It is not just about improving health care services. It supports a multisectoral approach to health. In Health 2020, health comes from the framework of societies and how these function, including the influences and opportunities that affect how individuals, families and communities live across the whole life-course. Nevertheless, influencing life circumstances in these ways is not easy and involves facing profound political, social and economic challenges.

Given today's greater burden of noncommunicable disease, Health 2020 makes the case for responding to the social determinants of health and pursuing upstream interventions to be focused on health promotion and disease prevention. Health systems need to be strengthened around effective primary care, and secondary and tertiary services need to be structured better, around evidence-informed practice,

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[1]Health 2020 is available on the website of the WHO Regional Office for Europe in two forms. The European policy framework for supporting government and society for health and well-being provides politicians and key policy practitioners with the main values, principles and strategic policy advice for putting Health 2020 into practice; and the longer Health 2020 policy framework and strategy provides much more detail and is meant for those who practice policy development and implementation at operational levels.

quality improvement and the empowerment and participation of people and patients. Public health capacity needs to be strengthened everywhere.

In the face of these challenges, Health 2020 proposes solutions that work. Meeting these challenges and implementing Health 2020 involves country-based political and professional leadership; good and modern governance for health; and structures and practices that enhance effective whole-of-government, whole-of-society and intersectoral work.

These principles form the basis of assessing the impact and implications of Health 2020 in a country. Health 2020 asks politicians, administrators, professionals and people at large to think wider, and broader, and more strategically. Developing a national health policy, with supporting strategies and plans, is a prerequisite. Determining what is needed and what needs to be done requires assessing the country context and opportunities, as a prelude to in-country discussion and policy development.

An assessment questionnaire

To help this assessment and discussion, a questionnaire is being tested to review country actions and intentions and will be published in November 2014. The tool is structured around a set of main questions and subquestions based on the Health 2020 framework of values, strategic objectives and four priority areas for policy action.

The checklist of main questions is outlined below.

In the country's available policy documents, and in discussions, are there commitments to address the following:

1. An integrated national health policy for health and welfare, drawing on the contribution of various sectors and using various entry points?

2. Equity and universal coverage?

3. Health as a major societal resource and asset?

4. A systematic approach to equity, human rights and gender?

5. The interacting determinants of health across the life-course, including the social determinants?

6. A modern whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach to improving health?

7. Leadership and governance for health and intersectoral action?

8. The empowerment of people and patients?

9. Strategies to tackle the major noncommunicable and communicable disease burdens, paying attention to inequities and the corresponding determinants?

10. Strengthening health systems, public health capacity and emergency preparedness and response?

11. Creating resilient communities and supportive environments?

12. Adding value through partnerships and partners for health?

13. Creating institutional capacity for intersectoral governance for health, tackling the social determinants of health and the health divide and addressing the social determinants of health?

14. Monitoring, evaluation and public health research?

Conclusion

Ultimately, the success of Health 2020 will depend on how successfully it is implemented in countries and the improvement in health experience and circumstances to which this implementation contributes. Embarking on developing health policies that are aligned with Health 2020 requires setting up a well-thought-through process. Thoroughly assessing how the policies of the country measure up to the values and approaches of Health 2020 is an excellent starting-point.