

Implementing a Health 2020 vision: governance for health in the 21st century – making it happen

Why commission this study on governance for health?

Health 2020, the new health policy for the WHO European Region, emphasizes the need for intersectoral collaboration and health in all policies. It is now widely recognized that people's health is shaped by many social and environmental determinants that lie beyond the policy responsibilities of a single ministry or government department. A new approach to integrated governance for health¹ is therefore critical for addressing today's complex health challenges.

The WHO Regional Office for Europe commissioned this study on governance for health to help policy-makers and advocates across the 53 countries of the Region to better understand the new policy environment, identify the new skills and capacities needed to implement the Health 2020 vision and provide leadership for health in changing 21st-century governance contexts. It was preceded by an earlier study, *Governance for health in the 21st century*, written by Ilona Kickbusch and David Gleicher, which drew on seven expert background papers and included a useful glossary of governance-related terms.

The study – *Implementing a Health 2020 vision: governance for health in the 21st century – making it happen* – was led by Ilona Kickbusch, Director of the Global Health Programme, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, Switzerland. The study report, written by Ilona Kickbusch and Thorsten Behrendt, is conceived as a "living document" that will be continuously enriched with new examples and analysis.

What's new and key messages

The report presents practical examples of how policy-makers and public health advocates are bringing together diverse players, coalitions and networks, including community, government and business representatives, in whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches. It recognizes that **there is no one-size-fits-all approach**. Whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches must be adapted to each country's unique circumstances and background, reflecting their constitutional, political and cultural traits. Implementing whole-of-government approaches may be ineffective, or even impossible, without a common ethos and strong unified sense of values that help to build trust across sectors. A risk-averse bureaucratic culture that overemphasizes the minimization of errors can inhibit horizontal experiments right from the beginning. An attitude that **it can be done** needs to pervade common endeavours.

Attributes of success in whole-of-society approaches are summarized in Box 1.

Box 1. Attributes of success in whole-of-society approaches

The following attributes are necessary to render the interactive process within whole-of-society approaches in relation to health successful:

- strong and sustained commitment of all actors at all levels
- good communication, adequate time and resources
- shared and innovative accountability arrangements
- clarity regarding different responsibilities and tasks
- a common understanding of objectives
- a valid theory of cause and effect and of managing change.

¹ Governance for health in this study is defined as the attempts of governments or other actors to steer communities, countries or groups of countries in the pursuit of health as integral to well-being through whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches.

A culture that is supportive of thinking and acting across agency borders can be attained through incentives and rewards that encourage organizational flexibility, adaptability and openness to creative and innovative policy-making. Health 2020 supports and encourages health ministries to bring key stakeholders together in a shared effort to promote and protect health. **New roles are necessary for new times**, and health sector policy-makers and advocates have new roles to play.

What's in the studies? Key lessons and recommendations

Governance for health in the 21st century tracks governance innovations introduced to address priority determinants of health and summarizes them as five strategic approaches to smart governance for health:

- valuing collaboration to facilitate communication, trust, commitment and understanding;
- engaging citizens to encourage participation, transparency and accountability;
- using a mix of regulation and persuasion to support health and engage actors;
- providing evidence through independent expert bodies such as federal agencies, commissions, regulators and auditors; and
- adapting quickly and anticipating future needs through improved forecasting and promoting multiple small-scale interventions at local and community levels.

The study describes how action involving health and other sectors, public and private actors and citizens has achieved seminal changes in 21st-century societies, including a new understanding of health and well-being as key features of successful societies and vibrant economies and a higher value being placed on equity and participation. It sets out the type of structures and mechanisms that enable collaboration and outlines new roles health ministries and public health agencies need to adopt in such a challenging policy environment (Box 2).

Box 2. New roles for public health officials

Senior civil servants in health ministries and heads of health agencies should develop organizations' capacity for smart governance for health and:

- adopt an extended understanding of health that looks outwards from the health sector as well as inwards;
- abandon linear thinking and accept the unpredictability and uncertainty of complexity;
- call on health policies and institutions to reflect better use of foresight, multistakeholder deliberation, promotion of variation, self-organizing networks, decentralized decision-making and continual learning and review to manage risks and create more enduring policies;
- assign the resources and, above all, the time to build intersectoral trust and understanding;
- identify interdependent goals jointly with partners in other ministries, the private sector and communities;
- take on the role of network manager, respecting network partners; and
- support national, regional and global dialogue on societal values and goals (of which health and well-being should be essential components) by facilitating universal ownership of the health agenda and recognizing that, in some cases, the health ministry will not lead.

Implementing a Health 2020 vision: governance for health in the 21st century – making it happen provides policy-makers with examples from around the world of how whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches have been implemented, with a set of tools to manage the complex policy process. Examples were selected to reflect the priority areas set by the Health 2020 policy framework and with the following criteria in mind: they provide useful lessons, often illustrate best practices, cover a wide variety of contexts and countries and, as far as possible, have been implemented and, ideally, evaluated.

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