

## Province of Utrecht, Netherlands

Fort Ruigenhoek

### General overview

Founded by Bishop Willibrord in the 7th century, the Province of Utrecht is the oldest of the 12 provinces in the Netherlands. It lies in the centre of the country as part of the Randstad Region (a megalopolis in the west-central part of the Netherlands, comprising the 4 largest Dutch cities, Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam and Utrecht). The Province of Utrecht itself consists of 26 municipalities and their surrounding areas.

Described as “the beating heart of the Netherlands”, the Province of Utrecht spans an area of 1449 km<sup>2</sup> and has a total population of 1 200 000 (1). The Province owes its strong economic position to its central geographic location, which links the west of the Netherlands (often called the Randstad Region) with the German Ruhr Area. Its largest cities are Amersfoort, Nieuwegein, Zeist and Utrecht (capital of the Province).

The Province of Utrecht combines urban living facilities in natural and green areas with the busiest rail/water/road networks in the Netherlands. Utrecht’s central railway station processes 57 million travellers each year – as many as Amsterdam Schiphol Airport. It is also one of the most densely populated regions in

the Netherlands with 904 residents per km<sup>2</sup>, compared to 513 residents per km<sup>2</sup> for the whole country (2).

In the Netherlands, the provinces represent the middle level of government and as such work in close cooperation with the municipalities and central Government. The Government of the Province of Utrecht has a tier comprising officials elected to serve on the Provincial Council and Provincial Executive; it employs roughly 800 civil servants.

The Province of Utrecht uses its constitutional powers to develop and implement integrated programmes and strategies on spatial planning, mobility, regional public transport, energy, housing and the environment. It does so, focusing on promoting a healthy living environment (especially the reduction of noise and air pollution) and a positive health approach among its citizens, which means actively promoting healthy life choices.

The Province does not have direct responsibility for public health. In the Netherlands, overall responsibility for the Dutch health-care system is at the national level. Central Government sets the health-care priorities, introducing legislative change when necessary and monitoring access,

quality and costs. It also partly finances social-health insurance. Prevention and social support are not part of social-health insurance but are financed through general taxation. Municipalities and health insurers are responsible for most outpatient long-term services and all youth care, using a provision-based approach (with a high level of freedom at the local level).

To achieve its health-and environment-related goals, the Province must work with public, private and knowledge-related partners alike. Luckily, it has an abundance of knowledge institutes, private-sector companies and start-ups from which it can profit.

According to WHO data (2018), the average life expectancy of residents in the Province of Utrecht is 82.6 years, compared to 80.6 years for those in the city of Utrecht. In 6 of the 26 municipalities, the average life expectancy, ranging between 84 and 85 years, is quite a bit higher than the national average of 81.4 years, which ranks the Netherlands seventeenth at the global level (3).



## Strengths

The strengths of the Province of Utrecht include:

- ✓ strong regional cooperation with knowledge and research institutes dealing with public health, health care and environment, such as the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment, the University Medical Centre Utrecht, the Hubrecht Institute, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, the "Princess Maxima Centre" for child cancer and the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute;
- ✓ Health Hub Utrecht, a multiple helix network working to promote positive health and attainable health care, comprising – among others – the City of Utrecht, the Province of Utrecht, the Economic Board Utrecht, the University of Utrecht, Utrecht University of Applied Sciences and the above-mentioned knowledge institutes, as well as private-sector practitioners;
- ✓ being a living lab in terms of healthy urban living, known for education, innovation and economics within health care in the Netherlands;
- ✓ having the most highly educated and practically trained workforce in the Netherlands (44% with a university degree) and +/- 60.000 students of which 85% speak at least 3 languages (4);
- ✓ being the fastest growing economic region in the Netherlands and the second most competitive region in Europe and an innovation leader, according to the EU Commission (5);
- ✓ having the tenth-best incubator in the world: UtrechtInc (university business incubator) (6).



## Aspirations

The Province is aiming to:

- ✓ become the healthiest region in Europe in terms of housing, working, living and mobility (which means working towards a healthy environment, a healthy economy and an inclusive recreational society focused on connectivity in the broadest terms);
- ✓ become an international living lab for innovative healthy urban living and find sustainable energy solutions for healthy growth and urbanization;
- ✓ reduce air and noise pollution towards meeting – by 2030 – the WHO standards for air quality and for noise pollution in new noise-sensitive buildings (such as, schools, hospitals, etc.) (7,8);
- ✓ increase joint initiatives between the government, knowledge institutes, private-sector companies and citizens.

## Challenges

These include:

- ✓ meeting housing needs (resulting from a population increase of +/- 160 000), which will demand roughly 30% more dwellings in 2050, while maintaining the Province as an attractive place to live, work, recreate and interact;
- ✓ preserving citizens' quality of life through affordable housing, clean energy, good infrastructure and a healthy living environment;
- ✓ finding better ways to equip health-care students for the needs of the future labour market and its challenges;
- ✓ finding ways of avoiding health-care issues, resulting from busy waterways, railroads and highways, while taking the rising mobility needs of the Province into account;
- ✓ finding the right form of effectively working together in a multiple helix network – a participatory and multidisciplinary approach, involving governmental institutions, knowledge institutions, private-sector companies and citizens;
- ✓ finding the spatial-planning arrangements (including green/recreational areas) in which citizens can lead healthy lives.

## Potential areas of collaboration

The Province of Utrecht is interested in collaborating with other regions on:

- ✓ finding ways of influencing policy-makers and integrating a healthy-living approach in all policy areas (Health in All Policies (HIAP)) (9, 10);
- ✓ developing a cross-border exchange of strategies, as well as best practice in healthy planning in urban and rural areas;
- ✓ further improving air quality and reducing noise pollution in accordance with the WHO guidelines (7,8);
- ✓ finding proven ways of effectively collaborating in a multiple helix, using a participatory and multidisciplinary approach.

## Working groups

The Province of Utrecht is interested in participating in working groups on:

- ✓ environment;
- ✓ participatory approaches/resilience;
- ✓ the all-of-government approach/intersectoral action.



## People active in the Regions for Health Network (RHN)

### *Political focal point*

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### *Technical focal points*

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<sup>1</sup> All URLs accessed 25 May 2019.