Governance snapshot: whole-of-society approach

The Coalition of Partners for Strengthening Public Health Services in the European Region

The Coalition of Partners for Strengthening Public Health Services in the European Region

The Coalition of Partners for Strengthening Public Health Services in the European Region (CoP) is a new initiative that aims to foster partnerships and new models of leadership through a whole-of-society approach to strengthening public health services in the WHO European Region. A whole-of-society approach ensures institutional coordination and coherence with partners from across society, a crucial aspect of effectively implementing multi- and intersectoral action. The CoP initiative presents an innovative and promising whole-of-society approach to respond to challenges and foster innovation and progress in the field of public health in the European Region.

The CoP was initiated by the WHO Regional Office for Europe in 2017, with a mission to drastically scale up support to Member States to make their public health services function better within the wider health system. More than a coalition, it strives to function as a systems platform, a community of practice and an incubator for new initiatives.

The CoP has six objectives.

1. The public health workforce is recognized and valued as a profession.
2. There is alignment between the allocation of human resources in public health services and the priorities determined by the burden of disease.
3. Public health leaders have the competencies required to function as effective change agents.
4. Member States have strong public health legislation enabling effective delivery of public health services.
5. Public health leaders advocate effectively for investment in public health services and apply strategic financial management practices.
6. Public health services are organized and governed effectively and efficiently.

Members of the CoP represent a diverse group of the many stakeholders and disciplines that contribute to public health services across the European Region. This includes colleagues serving in national and subnational public health services, policy-makers and colleagues serving in a number of international civil society organizations, such as the World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA), the European Public Health Association (EUPHA), International Association of National Public Health Institutes (IANPHI), Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region (ASPHER), European Public Health Alliance (EPHA), EuroHealthNet, the WHO European Healthy Cities Network, the Regions for Health Network and others.

Members of the CoP collaborate to foster national CoPs and create shared tools, case studies and other supportive resources. The added value accrues in the personal satisfaction of knowing colleagues who understand each other's perspectives, the sense of belonging to the CoP community in the European Region and the personal relationships that develop within the community. At present, the CoP is open to any professional who shares in the objective of strengthening public health services and endorses the purpose, theory of change and objectives of the CoP.

Governance for health and well-being

Governance for health and well-being is understood as the steering of "communities, whole countries or even groups of countries in the pursuit of health as integral to well-being through both whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches". Governance for health and well-being is a central building block of good governance; it is guided by a value framework that views health as a human right, a global public good, a component of well-being and a matter of social justice.

It builds on experiences gained in the health arena through multi- and intersectoral action, healthy public policy and health in all policies. Whole-of-society, whole-of-government and health-in-all-policies approaches require systematic multi- and intersectoral governance structures and processes that can facilitate and support action. This moves beyond the policy cycle and includes mechanisms for promoting coherence and accountability, enabling regulatory and legal frameworks, utilizing instruments for financing and joint action, and improving capacity within and beyond government actors.

What is a whole-of-society approach?

A whole-of-society approach aims to extend the whole-of-government approach by placing additional emphasis on the roles of the private sector, civil society and political decision-makers, such as parliamentarians.

By engaging the private sector, civil society, communities and individuals, the whole-of-society approach can strengthen the resilience of communities to withstand threats to their health, security and well-being. A whole-of-society approach goes beyond institutions; it influences and mobilizes local and global culture and media, rural and urban communities and all relevant policy sectors, such as the education system, the transport sector, the environment and even urban design.

How can a whole-of-society approach strengthen health and well-being and help achieve the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

Tackling the public health challenges of the 21st century and addressing the wider determinants of health, including the social determinants, requires engagement with all actors and stakeholders across society. In several countries, the private sector and civil society are recognized as playing key roles in achieving the goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, capitalizing on the positive synergies between government, private sector and civil society efforts to achieve the ambitious 2030 Agenda targets.

The CoP: the journey

Since its establishment, participatory meeting methods have been central to generating the shared sense of purpose, trust and mutual understanding that form the basis of the relationships at the heart of the CoP and which are necessary when following a whole-of-society approach. Gone are the multiple digital presentation slides and scripted panel debates. Instead, CoP meetings tend to be very dynamic and generative, featuring activities such as world cafés, open spaces and other types of group work. The process is emergent, with participants co-creating the agenda of the meeting on the spot, steering discussions and determining the outcomes. This is an essential prerequisite to achieving social innovation.

Tangible achievements

–   Colleagues in Kyrgyzstan have launched a participatory process to design reform of their public health services through mobilizing a Coordinating Council for Public Health (CCPH).

–   ASPHER has led the development of a roadmap for professionalizing the public health workforce and the European Competencies Framework for the Public Health Workforce. Many Member States have expressed interest in working with these frameworks at country level to strengthen their public health workforce.
–   IANPHI and WHO have jointly held workshops on change management processes in which Member States merge various institutions to form comprehensive national public health institutes to serve as central engines to drive public health action.
–   Colleagues at the University of Neufchatel, Switzerland, are working with colleagues in Kyrgyzstan, Serbia, Georgia and Switzerland to map implementation of the International Health Regulations (IHR) in national legislation.
–   EuroHealthNet is leading the development of a compendium of case studies illustrating novel approaches to financing health promoting services.

A way forward

To date, the CoP has employed an ad-hoc combination of policies and procedures based on WHO practices and the participatory practices of the Art of Hosting network. The Public Health Services Programme of the WHO Regional Office for Europe has functioned as the secretariat and primary governing body for the CoP. Current priorities include ensuring that membership of the CoP reflects the balance and diversity of the stakeholders that comprise public health services, and determining what governance structures and practices would best enable the CoP to sustain itself as a self-organizing forum. A further priority is to develop a learning and impact framework with which to monitor CoP activities.

Proposals for policies and practices of the CoP are currently being developed by an ad-hoc core team and advisory group comprising volunteers who stepped forward at the last CoP meeting in November 2018. The core team has been inspired by the methods of frontrunners in awareness-based transformational change, such as Otto Scharmer and his team at the Presencing Institute and the work of Frederik Laloux on transforming organizations. Over the course of 2019, the core team participated in the Presencing Institute's Societal Transformation Lab, a six-month experiential innovation process aimed at groups and organizations who, like the CoP, are working to develop more sustainable and equitable social systems worldwide based on a change framework called Theory U (Fig. 1). The so-called U process allowed the team to experiment with different ways of learning and knowing while at the same time providing an opportunity to reflect on where the CoP should take action for greatest systemic impact.

Figure 1. Theory U

Source: this work is licensed by the Presencing Institute – Otto Scharmer under Creative Commons Attribution Share Alike 3.0 Unported License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/). Replication does not imply endorsement of this publication or its contents by the Presencing Institute.

If your efforts to catalyze innovation in your national public health services are stagnating, you may find that a whole-of-society approach such as that followed by the CoP provides a welcome opportunity to experiment with a new approach and meaningfully engage stakeholders in shaping the universal health coverage agenda and pursuing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

This *Governance Snapshot* is part of a series that provides examples of whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches to strengthen health and well-being for all from across the WHO European Region. It complements the Multi- and Intersectoral brief series by the Governance for Health Programme, WHO Regional Office for Europe available at http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-policy/health-2020-the-european-policy-for-health-and-well-being/implementation-package/1.-introducing-health-2020-to-different-stakeholders-across-sectors/sector-briefs-intersectoral-action-for-better-health-and-well-being.

World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe
UN City, Marmorvej 51,
DK-2100 Copenhagen Ø, Denmark
Tel.: +45 45 33 70 00
Fax: +45 45 33 70 01
E-mail: eupcrgov@who.int