

SUPPORT OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE NORWEGIAN KINGDOM TO REDUCE INEQUALITIES OF THE LITHUANIAN HEALTH

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It is often said that health is the biggest assets. We can be delighted that many health indexes of the Lithuanian residents manifest improving tendencies. However the rates of improvement differ among different groups of society and regions. According to numerous scientific researches, such inequalities are some of the highest among the European countries. For example, the life span of the Lithuanian men is shorter by almost 11 years than that of women; the persons with higher education live for 11,3 years on average longer than the persons with secondary or lower education; the average life span of city residents is by 3 years longer than the life span of residents of rural settlements; the women with lower income experience health problems on average 3,2 times more than the women with bigger income, etc. Therefore it is to some purpose that reduction of health inequalities is named as the strategic aim of the Lithuanian health problem for 2014/2025. In June 2014 the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences signed the contract regarding implementation of the project "Creation of Model to strengthen the Capacities to Determine and Reduce Health Inequalities" (No. NOR-LT11-SAM-01-TF-02-001) that would be financed by the Norwegian financial mechanism and the Lithuanian national budget. The Norwegian financial mechanism is used to contribute to reduction of economic and social differences in the European Economic Area and to strengthen the bilateral relations of Norway and countries – support receivers through allocation of financial contributions to the underlying sectors. This project is meant to solve the problems of the Lithuanian health inequalities, to develop the administrative capacities of determination, evaluation and reduction of health inequalities on the national and regional (municipal) levels with regard to employees, who participate in formation and implementation of policy in various sectors (health and related) and with regard to employees of health bureaus. The especially big attention is given to induce intersectional cooperation in order to ensure complex reduction of social, economic, as well as health inequalities. While implementing the project, the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences, Vilnius University, Klaipeda University and Institute of Hygiene use the good foreign experience to create the model for strengthening of capacities to determine and reduce health inequalities, which could be constantly used by the health politicians and specialists working in the area of public health. In such a way the public health would be improved and the health inequalities in Lithuania would be reduced.

THE PROJECT „DEVELOPMENT OF THE MODEL FOR THE STRENGTHENING OF THE CAPACITIES TO IDENTIFY AND REDUCE HEALTH INEQUALITIES“ NOR-LT11-SAM-01-TF-02-001

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Socioeconomic inequalities in health and health care are important challenges for public health. Systematic inequalities in morbidity, mortality, health services use and accessibility between socioeconomic groups exist in most of the countries. However, the vast of scientific data suggest, that these inequalities are more expressed in countries in transitions. In terms of health inequalities, Lithuania appears in the range of the countries with the most unfavourable situation in the European Union. In 2014, the Lithuanian Parliament (Seimas) approved the Lithuanian Health Programme 2014–2025. One of strategic goals of this programme is to reduce health and health care inequalities in Lithuania. For achieving the reduction of inequalities in health and health care, Lithuania has started to implement the project “development of the Model for the Strengthening of the Capacities to identify and reduce Health inequalities“. This project is financed by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009–2014 Programme “Public Health initiatives“ and will be implemented in 2014–2016. The project is aimed at development an evidence based platform for health and health care inequalities monitoring and strengthening administrative capacities of persons involved in the policy making at national and municipal levels. For this purpose, Norway’s experience in identification and reduction of social inequalities in health, and the practice of implementation of the Norwegian national Strategy to reduce Social inequalities in Health which is recognized by the who as a model for other European countries, are of great importance. This project will be sought to develop the respective fields intended for the improvement of public health and reduction of health inequalities in Lithuania by maintaining cooperation with the respective Norwegian institutions and strengthening bilateral relations. Lithuanian University of Health Sciences, Vilnius University, Klaipeda University and the institute of Hygiene will create the model of health inequalities’ identification, measurement and reduction. It will be developed according to the international and national experience, legal documentation (national or international) analysis, and human recourses potential analysis and will contribute to capacity building for reducing health inequalities at municipal and national level through continuous training and awareness raising. This model will be developed based on identified country specific needs and on international evidence. It is expected, that it will be regularly used by the target groups thereby improving public health and reducing health and health care inequalities in Lithuania. Moreover, this model could be transferable example for other countries, which are tackling health inequalities.

LITHUANIAN UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCES, VILNIUS UNIVERSITY, KLAIPEDA UNIVERSITY AND INSTITUTE OF HYGIENE ARE IMPLEMENTING COMMON PROJECT

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The Lithuanian University of Health Sciences, Vilnius University, Klaipeda University and Institute of Hygiene are implementing common project "Creation of Model to strengthen the Capacities to Determine and Reduce Health Inequalities (NOR -LT11- SAM-01-TF-02-001)", financed by the programme of the Norwegian financial mechanism for 2009–2014 No. LT 11 "Initiatives for Public Health". The purpose of this project is to prepare the recommendations for observation and reduction of health inequalities and to improve the competences of specialists of this area responsible for monitoring and reduction of health inequalities. In the beginning of 2015 the knowledge of the officers of public health bureaus and municipal health departments on health inequalities and their observation was tested. On this occasion we have interviewed the Professor of LSMU Department of Health Management Mindaugas Stankūnas.

Could you tell in more detail about purpose and course of this research?

One of the project's tasks is to prepare recommendations for observation and reduction of health inequalities. Therefore before starting to prepare recommendations, it would be meaningful to learn what problems are encountered and what skills are lacking. The qualitative and quantitative researches have been carried out. The data of the qualitative research were collected using the method of group discussions. The respondents were asked open questions and invited to discuss them. In total 8 discussions with 58 persons representing various sectors and organizations were conducted. The municipal doctors, employees of health departments, administrators of public health bureaus and specialists from the departments of public health monitoring, strengthening, health of children and young people were invited to take part in the quantitative research. The survey lasted for 30 days (March 2015). On the level of municipal research 150 completed questionnaires were received (total response frequency 47,2 percent). On the level of national quantitative research 236 respondents working in various national institutions (including 131 representatives of health sector and 105 representatives of other sectors) were questioned.

Why are health inequalities researched? Why are they important?

The abundance of scientific researches reveals that health inequalities in Lithuania are one of the biggest in Europe. The life span of the Lithuanian men is shorter by almost 11 years than that of women; the persons with higher education live for 11,3 years on average longer than the persons with secondary or lower education; the average life span of city residents is by 3 years longer than the life span of residents of rural settlements; the women with lower income experience health problems on average 3,2 times more than the women with bigger income, etc. Therefore it is to some purpose that reduction of health inequalities is named as the strategic aim of the Lithuanian health problem for 2014/2025.

Maybe you have already achieved any results you could share with "Avevita" readers?

At present the data are analysed and only the first results could be mentioned. The research revealed that all the respondents had acknowledged presence of the problem of health inequalities in municipalities. Moreover, the replies were received that public health specialists still lack knowledge about observation and reduction of health inequalities. How will the results be used to solve the problem of health inequalities in Lithuania? The recommendations are under preparation and the platform of monitoring and electronic evaluation of health inequalities is under construction. The study programme on monitoring and reduction of health inequalities meant for employees of public health bureaus, representatives of municipal administrations and politicians will be prepared this year already on the ground of research results.

PROJECT OF HEALTH INEQUALITIES WAS PRESENTED IN THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC HEALTH CONFERENCE IN MILAN



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The Lithuanian University of Health Sciences, Vilnius University, Klaipeda University and Institute of Hygiene are implementing the project “Creation of Model to strengthen the Capacities to Determine and Reduce Health Inequalities“, financed by the programme of the Norwegian financial mechanism No. LT 11 “Initiatives for Public Health“. The main purpose of this project is to prepare the recommendations for observation and reduction of health inequalities and to improve the competences of employees of municipal public health bureaus and employees of national and municipal level related to health inequalities in this area. The European Public Health Conference was held in Milan (Italy). It is the major event of such character in the Old Continent that is receiving more and more participants from the remote corners of the world, e.g. Australia and New Zealand. The representatives of the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences and the Institute of Hygiene also took part in the conference. They had engaged in implementation of the project on health inequalities actively. Four presentations prepared on the ground of the research were made during the conference. During the research the representatives of municipal public health bureaus, representatives of national health policy (e.g. Ministry of Health), and representatives of national and other sectors related to health inequalities were questioned. In order to understand and identify the present situation and its improvement possibilities better, the qualitative and quantitative research methods were applied. The respondents distinguished the following major problems of reduction of health inequalities: lack of inequalities’ monitoring on the municipal and national levels, lack of active and consistent policy and leadership for intersectional cooperation. These fundamental messages were reflected in all the presentations. It is a pleasure to mention that the presentations have received the attention of the conference’s participants. The discussions were started, during which the project was presented more widely and the ideas were exchanged, how to improve the situation. The conference granted the opportunity to get familiar with good experience of observation and reduction of health inequalities in other countries. The knowledge and experience acquired during the conference will help to continue developing the project and to achieve the main strategic goal of the Lithuanian health programme for 2014-2025 – to reduce health inequalities, as well as to improve the health of us all.

WE CARE ABOUT HEALTH INEQUALITIES

The Lithuanian University of Health Sciences (LSMU) and its partners – Institute of Hygiene (HI), Klaipeda University (KU) and Vilnius University (VU) – are implementing common project “Creation of Model to strengthen the Capacities to Determine and Reduce Health Inequalities (NOR -LT11- SAM-01-TF-02-001)”, financed by the programme of the Norwegian financial mechanism for 2009–2014 No. LT 11 “Initiatives for Public Health”.



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(Avevita / 22 April 2016, No. 16)

During the project the recommendations were prepared, how to reduce the health inequalities on national and municipal levels. The experts from all the institutions participating in the project were working with the task. However it was desired to discuss the prepared recommendations with the representatives of municipal public health offices and other institutions contributing to reduction of health inequalities in Lithuania. For this purpose the team of representatives of LSMU and the Institute of Hygiene visited three municipalities – Klaipeda region, Plunge region and Druskininkai – in April. It should be mentioned that the recommendations and their discussion received big attention not only from persons working in health system but also from the municipal administration and other departments. We were especially delighted that these meetings received interest of top municipal officers, as well. The mayor of Plunge region A. Klisonis, vice mayor of Klaipeda region V. Riaukiene and vice mayor of Druskininkai L. Urmanavicius took part in all the discussions. Thus the issues of health and reduction of health inequalities are really important and relevant not only to the medics but also to wider circle of society. It has been scientifically proven that main three reasons of health inequalities are alcohol consumption, smoking and unsuitable availability of health care services. Therefore the project's organizers gave the major attention to preparation of recommendations, how to reduce these reasons. Besides, the recommendations, how to reduce health inequalities through improved nutrition, inducement of physical activeness and prevention of suicides, were prepared. The whole package of recommendations was presented during the meetings. However the major attention was given to the recommendations, how to reduce alcohol consumption and to solve the problem of suicides. So Professor Aurelijus Veryga, manager of LSMU Institute of Health Researches, received the biggest burden – to answer hundreds of questions about these recommendations. The tour of their presentation was also very beneficial for the ones, who had prepared them. The comments, insights and good practice will definitely contribute to improvement of recommendations. The team of recommendation preparation plans the meeting and discussion of these visits in the near future. The amended recommendations will be issued and distributed publicly to public health bureaus and all the interested institutions. In the end it would be meaningful to mention that the public health bureaus and municipalities are doing many wonderful things in the area of health and reduction of health inequalities. It is a pity that sometimes we know too little about them. We often go to foreign countries in search for examples of good practice, while they are here! We believe that it would be meaningful to start regular conferences of the Lithuanian public health, which would become a place to share good practice. It really exists!

PROJECT OF HEALTH INEQUALITIES WAS PRESENTED IN JERUSALEM

The 6th International Jerusalem Conference of Health Policy was held on the 23rd-25th of May in Jerusalem (Israel). More than 500 participants from 40 countries have attended, including the professor of the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences Mindaugas Stankūnas.

Loreta Giedraitienė
(Avevita / 10 June 2016, No. 23)

Could you describe the International Jerusalem Conference of Health Policy and what was the predominant topic?

Since 1995 the Israeli National Institute of Health Policy Researches has been organizing international conferences regarding health policy every three-four years. I have participated in this event for the first time. I was pleasantly surprised by the number of participants and quality of the event. The plenary presentations were of the top level. They were given by the scientists from Harvard University, London Economic School, London School of Hygiene and Tropic Medicine, Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and other prominent institutions. The predominant topics of this year were health changes in society, health policy and its determinants, while the social-economic health inequalities received major attention. It should be noted that Lithuania has been mentioned frequently as the country, which is characterized by the biggest health inequalities in Europe.



Why is the topic of health inequalities relevant for Lithuania?

As it has been mentioned by other participants of the conference, Lithuania is really distinguished by "impressive" inequalities of health and health care. I will give several examples. The life span of the Lithuanian men and women differs by 11 years, i.e. the men in Lithuania live 11 years less than women. Women live longer than men almost in all the countries of the world. The mean of old states of the European Union (EU-15) reaches around 5 years. Even the difference of our "brothers" Latvians is shorter by almost 2 years. The saddest thing about this problem is that prevented mortality (especially due to external reasons, such as traumas, suicides, road accidents, etc.) is the main reason of such inequalities. It should be also noted that they are inseparable from alcohol consumption and smoking. We often speak about the emigration that cause fear in Lithuania, but we forget that the evident health inequalities cause to lose similar number of people. The difference is that the emigrants may return to Lithuania, while ... It is delightful that this problem has been receiving more and more attention in Lithuania. The best example is that one of the strategic goals of the Lithuanian health programme for 2014-2025 is to reduce health inequalities.

What was your presentation about?

My presentation had two main objectives. The first was to introduce the situation of health inequalities in Lithuania, and the second was to discuss the measures used to change the present situation. I supervise the project meant to solve this problem, so I attributed the major share of the presentation to it.

Could you share the first results of the project?

Since 2014 the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences and its partners Vilnius University, Klaipeda University and Institute of Hygiene have been implementing the project "Creation of Model to strengthen the Capacities to Determine and Reduce Health Inequalities (NOR -LT11- SAM-01-TF-02-001)", financed by the programme of the Norwegian financial mechanism for 2009–2014 No. LT 11 "Initiatives for Public Health". It is possible to distinguish three fundamental activities of the project. The first is meant to prepare recommendations for observation of health inequalities. It is especially important because in absence of reliable data it would be difficult to plan further effective measures. The addressees of these recommendations are first of all the employees of public health bureaus because they are the ones who have been granted this function by the

State. All of us may examine the available information using the illustration system of health inequalities created during the project "SveNAS" (address: <http://svenas.lt/>). The second activity is meant to prepare the recommendations how to reduce health inequalities. The entire team of the project was divided into four groups and prepared the set of recommendations related to key determinants of health inequalities – smoking, alcohol consumption, immobility, and aggravated availability of health care services. The third activity is related to the topics of teaching of public health specialists and health politicians about health inequalities. We really hope that all these measures will help to reduce this sore problem in Lithuania.

Thank you for interview and good luck in further works with the project.