

Conclusions by the Chair

The Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS) held its thirteenth Annual Conference (PAC) on 9 February 2018 in Tallinn, Estonia. Mr. Jevgeni Ossinovski, Minister of Health and Labour hosted and NDPHS CSR Chair, Dr. Maris Jesse, Deputy Secretary General on Health at the Ministry of Social Affairs chaired the Conference. Ministers responsible for health and social affairs and other high representatives of NDPHS Partner countries and organizations participated in the meeting.

The PAC discussed current and future challenges related to public health and social well-being in the Northern Dimension area and regional cooperation to better address these challenges through NDPHS. More in-depth discussions were held on two topics – health system strengthening for universal health coverage and the main theme of the conference: “Harmful use of Alcohol in Northern Dimension area – Perspectives and Responses”.

A “NDPHS Declaration on Alcohol Policy” was adopted as detailed further down to reflect the Partnership’s views and commitment to further action.

Regional cooperation for better health and social well-being

The PAC agreed that all Partners face similar health and social well-being challenges. Regional cooperation is essential for both an effective response to these challenges and for ensuring long-term socio-economic stability and prosperity of the countries and the region as a whole. The Partnership provides a unique platform for concerted action in the area of health and social well-being through better collaboration and coordination of international activities, as well as by bringing together experts from the region and learning from each other.

The PAC noted the outcome of the Fifth Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum held on 22 November 2017 in Brussels, Belgium. It highly appreciated the participating parliamentarians’ continued interest in health and social welfare issues and their support for the NDPHS and the work carried out by it.

The PAC welcomed the presentation on the use of evidence in policy-making made by the WHO Regional Office for Europe, and recognizes that such evidence is of limited value until used to improve the health and well-being of individuals and populations. The partnership strongly supports the implementation of the “Action plan to strengthen the use of evidence, information and research for policy-making in the WHO European Region”, which was adopted in 2016. The Action plan is implemented by the European Health Information Initiative (EHII), with the Evidence-informed Network (EVIPNet) Europe and the newly established European Health Research Network (Sofia Declaration) as two of the key capacity-building pillars.

The PAC stressed the importance of consolidating, strengthening and promoting the generation and use of multidisciplinary and intersectoral sources of evidence for health

policy-making. The PAC further called on its members to support these initiatives both nationally as well as through exploring opportunities to strengthen collaboration with the WHO Regional Office for Europe to ensure that the work of its Expert Groups is effectively translated to policy- and other decision-makers.

The Partnership will continue providing a useful platform for concerted action in regional efforts on strengthening the use of the best available evidence and affordable evidence-based policies on issues of public health and social well-being. To that end the PAC expressed its satisfaction with the NDPHS Strategy 2020 and its Action Plan. It further expressed its appreciation for the efforts by the NDPHS Expert Groups in fulfilling the objectives of the Strategy and Action plan and called on the Partner Countries and Partner Organizations to ensure that proper human and financial resources be provided to help achieve all the objectives set in the documents.

The PAC thanked the Partners for the support provided to the Partnership so far, not least Finland, Germany, Norway, Russia and Sweden for their leadership in the Expert Groups and the European Union for the project funds provided. The PAC further thanked the NDPHS Secretariat for its hard and fruitful work and dedication in coordinating the work of the Partnership, supporting the chairmanship and for improving the Partnership's visibility.

Health system strengthening for universal health coverage

The PAC welcomed a presentation by the Estonian Chairmanship on Estonia's recent experience with reforming primary healthcare, ensuring sustainable financing and work towards achieving universal health coverage. The PAC further appreciated the fact that Universal Health Coverage is the overarching priority for the WHO Director-General, and that 2018 will give ample opportunities to discuss it in greater detail, not least during the WHO European High Level Meeting "Health systems for prosperity and solidarity – leaving no one behind", 13-14 June 2018 in Tallinn, Estonia.

The PAC stressed the importance of achieving universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all, as agreed in the Sustainable Development Goal 3 target 3.8.

Harmful use of alcohol in Northern Dimension area – perspectives and responses

The PAC discussed the outcome of the regional conference "Harmful use of Alcohol in Northern Dimension area – Perspectives and Responses" held the day before the Partnership Annual Conference. The event participants discussed the situation in the region, the results of specific regional projects as well as cross-border issues and responses at the local municipality level.

The PAC expressed its appreciation to the NDPHS Expert Group on Alcohol and Substance Abuse for its excellent work on the event and the preparations leading up to it. It shared the participants' view that the harmful use of alcohol is one of the main risk factors for non-communicable diseases and negatively affects population health and well-being. The NDPHS Strategy 2020 and its Action Plan tackle alcohol along with substance abuse as one of NDPHS's priorities.

The PAC further recognized that the harmful use of alcohol has a far-reaching impact beyond health. It brings social and economic harm through crime, violence, harm to children and families as well as loss of productivity and an increased burden on social and health care systems.

Having in mind the above and recognizing that the harmful use of alcohol is a problem for all Partner Countries that requires multi-sectorial action and regional co-operation, the PAC adopted the NDPHS Declaration “the NDPHS Declaration on Alcohol Policy”.

Final provisions

The PAC thanked Estonia for successfully chairing and Latvia for successfully co-chairing the Partnership during its two-year term and further thanked Estonia for the excellent hosting of the PAC and its side-event: “Harmful use of Alcohol in Northern Dimension area – Perspectives and Responses”.

The PAC expressed its appreciation to the NDPHS Secretariat for its excellent work and support to the Partnership during the Estonian Chairmanship.

The PAC elected Latvia as the Partnership Chair and Poland as the Co-Chair for the next two years.

The PAC decided to hold the next ministerial-level Partnership Annual Conference in 2019.