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# **STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR PUBLIC HEALTH OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA WITH ACTION PLAN UNTIL 2020**

## **Introduction**

### *Why we need a strategy for public health*

**T**he vision of the public health is to promote better health and well-being of the population in a sustainable manner through integrated public health services and reducing inequalities. To achieve this vision, public health approach involves intersectoral collaboration in the effort to ensure adequate response to all determinants of health, but as well collaboration with the health professionals—and primary health care providers in particular, which play key role in health promotion and prevention and early detection of diseases.

The main challenges that public health in the Republic of Macedonia is facing are: economic-crisis, widespread inequalities, aging population, increased incidence of chronic diseases, migration and urbanization, disturbance of the environment and the climate change.

Although there is a long-standing history of good results in providing preventive services such as immunization and systematic exam-

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inations of children and youth, the public health system in the country is largely based on the traditional public health model, particularly oriented towards immunization, hygiene and epidemiology. The databases and the health information systems are not yet fully synchronized and integrated between institutions responsible for their collection. The databases and health information systems are not yet fully integrated and synchronized between institutions responsible for their collection. Existing data is not always standardized and uniformly collected and rarely is subject to quality control.

In this context, it is necessary to develop policies and mechanisms for monitoring the social determinants of health, in order to determine and reduce the causes of health inequalities.

Additionally, it is necessary to strengthen the health promotion, prevention and early detection of diseases, information on healthy lifestyles and health risks, strengthening the secondary prevention through larger coverage of the screening programs, collecting and analyzing data from the screenings and use them to inform policies for adopting a better structured interventions for prevention and early detection of diseases; strengthening the tertiary prevention by involving other sectors such as social care, housing and so forth.

The improving of the population health to a large extent depends on the quality and the training of public health professionals, an issue that requires strategic approach to the formulation of the needs, revision of the educational programs, and establishment of accreditation system and continuous public health education (CPHE).

The public health research is extremely important element of the process of evidence gathering aimed at assisting policy-making processes, making decisions, and thus there is a need of more research activities, collecting and documenting evidence, in order to strength the knowledge base which should be the primary source that inform policies in their creating, evaluation and revision.

### ***What will change?***

*Condition that will get with the new Strategic Framework - mechanisms and directions for improvement*

As part of a National Health 2020 Strategy “Together for Health for All” with its common vision, the Strategic Framework for Public Health with Action Plan until 2020, envisions significantly improved health system, reduced health inequalities, strengthening of the public health, equitable, sustainable and high quality health system for the people and benefits from

the social and economic development for the health and well-being of the population in general.

The strategic framework is part of the strategy Health 2020 the Republic of Macedonia “Together for Health for All” with a common vision: Fair society, a healthier nation, according to which until 2020, the Republic Macedonia will be a country where the health and the well-being of the population will be significantly improved, the health inequalities reduced, the public health strengthened with the secured universal, equitable, sustainable and high quality people-centred health system as a contribution and benefit to the social and economic development.

Through reducing the health inequalities and establishing strong and sustainable services and public health capacities, the Public Health Strategic Framework promotes its vision for better public health and well-being

A successful implementation of the Strategic framework for Public Health 2020 will contribute to improving the overall health of the population in the country, through improved service quality will reduce the health inequalities, establish and strengthen the cooperation and coordination of the responsible entities, and partnerships with other sectors, and will strengthen the promotion of health and public health research.

### **Summary of the priority areas and activities of the Strategic Framework for Public Health in the Republic of Macedonia with Action Plan 2020**

The key strategic areas for improving the public health arise as a result of the self-assessment of the Essential Public Health Operations (EPHOs), in which all organizational measures (whether public or private) are addressed in order to prevent diseases, promote health and prolong the lifespan of the entire population.

In accordance with the 10 EPHOs, the strategic framework defines priority to the following areas and activities:

- 1. Surveillance of population health and wellbeing**, by strengthening and improving the efficiency of the system for monitoring and surveillance of diseases and health indicators of the population, systematic monitoring and evaluation of the population health status, establishing of a single health information system, improving the capacities for monitoring the performance of the health system.
- 2. Monitoring and response to health hazards and emergencies** by strengthening the capacity for early detection, and tracking risks that endanger health at the national, regional and local level, strengthening the capacities for effectiveness and quick (rapid) response for pub-

- lic-health crisis / emergency and / or urgent conditions, improvement of the coordination, communication and information with the public, as well as implementing of the International Health Regulations (IHR).
3. **Health protection including environmental, occupational, food safety** through environment protection and managing the health risks from environmental pollution, but also improving patient safety, road safety, health and safety at work, the safety of the consumers and improvement of food safety control system.
  4. **Health promotion social determinants and health inequity** through strengthening the intersectoral and interdisciplinary capacities, improving the health system capacity in health promoting, as well as creating of an appropriate response to the behavioral, social and environmental health determinants and risk factors through the approach “whole-government“ and ”whole-society“ in order to promote healthy lifestyles.
  5. **Disease prevention and early detection**, with a focus on improving the primary, secondary and tertiary prevention, as well as establishing a sustainable system of health care for migrants, asylum seekers, homeless and other vulnerable populations.
  6. **Assuring governance for health and wellbeing**, by improving the governance-management for health, including all relevant factors from the public sector, business and academic community, civil society and the general public.
  7. **Assuring a sufficient and competent public health workforce** through appropriate planning, development and promotion.
  8. **Assuring sustainable organizational structures and financing**, which includes revision and reorganization, in terms of funding the infrastructure for ensuring proper implementation of public health functions and services.
  9. **Information, communication and social mobilization** through strengthening the information and communication system and preparing the Action plan for health information flow in the field of public health and a protocol for connecting the institutions in the health network and (the way of feeding) the integrated health information system according with the amendments of the Law on Healthcare.
  10. **Advancing public health research to inform policy and practice** by strengthening the existing research capacities for preparation of policy-relevant data, including new methods of research and innovative technologies.

## **Methodology / Process:**

### ***The involvement of key sectors, partners and citizens***

This document contains the strategic directions for developing activities and improvement the public health in the Republic of Macedonia which are based on global and European, as well as nationally available evidence and over the assessment and prioritization on the national challenges under which they should be properly addressed till 2020. The process for the preparation of a strategic framework and action plan for health promotion in the Republic of Macedonia began in 2015, upon initiative and request of the Ministry of Health and with the expert technical assistance of WHO. The base of this process appears as a complement and logistic sequence of some previous initiatives, such as the self-assessment of Essential Public Health Operations (EPHOs) conducted at national level in 2014.

In April 2015, a workshop was conducted for validation of the EPHO self-assessment tool, discussion of results and initiation of development of the Action Plan for Public Health until 2020. The participants at the workshop were representatives of national and public administration, professional and academic experts and institutions from all relevant sectors, as well as the civil society representatives. In order to define the strategic priorities with specific activities, this workshop provided information and useful expert report, which presented the current situation grasped through the self-assessment and the envisaged areas for action. The defined priority areas for action were further elaborated by 4 working groups, each responsible for delivering on 2-3 EPHOs, with wide participation of the representatives of several sectors and institutions and the civil society. In the further preparation of the document other sectors were involved through the “health in all policies” approach, in order to be fully aligned with “whole-of-government” and “whole-of-society” approaches and to address the complex multi-sectoral issues of public health, which affects all of us.

**Applied methodology**—self-assessment of the EPHOs, plenary presentations, expert missions, workshops, individual meetings and group work (SMART technique, literature searching, prioritizing).

**Three main segments** of the strategic package were prepared, including:

**PART 1:** Strategic Framework for Public Health of the Republic of Macedonia

**PART 2:** Action Plan for Public Health of the Republic of Macedonia until 2020, with defined priority actions for the 10 EPHOs.

**PART 3:** Book of evidence on the Strategic Framework for Public Health Plan of the Republic of Macedonia with Action until 2020.

The book of evidence allows theoretical support for the (outlined) priorities and represents a scientific and expert-applicative basis for policy making, and implementation of the essential public health activities. The book is conceptualized in 4 main segments of documents and publications: legal regulations, strategies and other documents of strategic importance; scientific, expert-applicative and informative publications and statistical documents. All these documents are available on Health2020 E-platform as an interactive web-based e-platform that enables continuous exchange of information during the process of analysis, planning, public discussion and setting priorities and activities of the national Health 2020 Strategy.

### **Expected results**

In the process of defining the strategic directions for improving the health and the well-being as a part of the national health strategy ‘Together for Health forAll’ were defined the following general goals in relation for public health and its contribution to the realization of the common vision:

- Improving the health and well-being of the population throughout life course, through the “whole-of-government”, “whole-of-society” and “health in all policies” approaches;
- Reducing health inequalities through decreasing the negative impact of social determinants of health with a special focus on the most affected vulnerable groups.
- Enabling active participation and taking responsibility of each individual, community and sector in promoting the citizens health;
- Better health and well-being by reducing health inequalities and establishing strengthened and sustainable public health services and capacities.
- Improvement and strengthening of the public health capacities and services within the national health system in all sectors and at all levels of the society in order to ensure the delivery of essential public health operations (EPHO) and a basic package of accessible, high quality, efficient and effective public health services at individual, community and population level.

A structure for implementation, monitoring and assessment of the Strategic Framework and the Action Plan was proposed, with the main coordination role of the monitoring, assessment and reporting regarding to the

Strategic framework and realization of the Action Plan for Public Health till 2020 is with the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Macedonia, and as well, in this process, the reviving of the National Council for Public Health (NCPH) is envisaged.

In order to provide continuity in the monitoring, assessment and reporting on the implementation of the activities, the Ministry of Health is responsible for setting up a team consisting of representatives of Ministry of Health, Institute of Public Health and representatives of other institutions depending to the priority areas, whose task will be to regularly monitor the situation, provide communication with other sectors involved in the implementation of the activities of the Strategic Framework and Action plan and submit information to the NCPH.

Towards this end, the Strategic Framework envisages establishment of a separate unit within the Ministry of Health for monitoring and evaluation of the public health programs.

The planning of the necessary financial, human and other resources for the implementation of this Action Plan is the responsibility of the Ministry of Health with a coordinating role in the allocation of public funds and donations intended for the public health.

**Next steps:**

- Presentation of the documents to the Committee for Environment and Health.
- Public hearing of the documents (website of the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning).
- Adoption by the government of the Republic of Macedonia
- A parallel process of research, evidence gathering, analysis of the existing activities and ensuring resources for establishment of new indicators, completing the book of evidence, and
- Implementation of actions in accordance with the set priorities and dynamics at the central and local level with parallel action of the relevant sectors and factors, with the earmarked financial resources and an established infrastructure in accordance with the recommendations in the Strategy.

### **Support of the World Health Organization (WHO) of the national process for defining the Strategic framework for Public Health in the Republic of Macedonia with an Action Plan by 2020**

WHO supports in continuous the national process for health and environment, in order for strategic orientation of the action until 2020 and its operational organization, by establishing and applying a strong framework for monitoring and evaluation, as part of the established priorities of the Biannual cooperation agreement 2014/2015. Within these ranges, in 2014, it was realized a mission of experts from the WHO self-assessment of Essential Public Health Operations (EPHO) nationwide. In 2015 WHO supports the participatory process for defining the priorities and objectives of the Strategy and the Action Plan for Public Health by 2020 using modern communication tools in order to allow wide participation of all parties concerned and intersectoral approach. The support of WHO remains with particular focus on the vulnerable groups of population, social determinants of health and reducing health discrepancies.



## Executive summary

According to the World Health Organization definition, public health constitutes all “organized activities (public or private) to prevent disease, promote health and generally to prolong life among the population as a whole”. Public Health activities are focused on the entire population or specific population groups. The public health is concerned with the overall health and not only dealing with particular disease or condition.

The organized activities of the society to protect and improve population’s health are faced with major challenges. Health inequalities between countries and between regions within countries are ever so emphasized, which affects the socio-economic living conditions. The causes of the burden of disease nowadays most commonly are rooted in the societal milieu, living conditions, lifestyles and the environment, but also in the organization of health systems, the appropriate allocation and the use of available material and human resources.

The public health system in Macedonia has a substantial, almost 90 years long tradition, a period in which numerous accomplishments have been achieved, mainly in eradication of and protection from many communicable diseases, but also a period in which a system of public health institutions has been established with highly specialized public health professionals and a system which in 2010 has set up its functioning on the basis of Essential Public Health Operations (EPHOs) and through a separate Law on public health. However, many weaknesses of the system have been identified, first and foremost the need for its modernization, realignment and restructuring towards modern public health, which will engage all sectors and segments of the society, including the citizens and general public.

The strategic framework and the envisaged public health actions are designed in the spirit of the European Action Plan for Strengthening the Public Health Capacities and Services, and the WHO European framework policy for health and well-being, Health 2020, representing a strong commitment to achieving the goals of providing better and more accessible public health services in the Republic of Macedonia.

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