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ROLE OF PUBLIC HEALTH COUNCILS IN THE PROMOTION OF PUBLIC HEALTH AT LOCAL LEVEL

1. Introduction

Public health is the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through organised efforts of society (Acheson, 1988). According to the Macedonian Law on Public Health, the public health system monitors and analyses population health with the aim of its betterment by affecting such health risk factors as environmental factors, causes of disease, lifestyle and socioeconomic factors (Law on Public Health, 2010).

The system of public health in the Republic of Macedonia has rich and nearly 90 years' long history and legacy; a period of numerous achievements mainly in the area of eradication of and protection from many infectious diseases, but also a period of establishing the system of public health institutions with highly specialised public health staff, and a system which, in 2010, instituted its activity by means of essential public health operations, under a separate Law on Public Health. Actions to implement essential public health operations for surveillance and control

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of communicable and non-communicable diseases, environmental risk assessment, adaptation to climate change, but also readiness to respond to diverse crisis situations, promotion of healthy lifestyle and early prevention of disease burdening modern life, are all being carried out through a distinct Public Health Programme, financed from the Budget of the Republic of Macedonia. Special attention is given to protecting the health of vulnerable groups of population and marginalised populations (Strategic Framework for Public Health of the Republic of Macedonia with Action Plan until 2020).

2. Legal framework

The Law on Public Health regulates the implementation of the Essential public health operations and tasks, the public health system, public health extraordinary circumstances and public health funding.

The goals and objectives of the law is to set a legal grounds for:

1. Preserving and promoting population health;
2. Ensuring implementation of fundamental public health functions and tasks through organised measures and activities undertaken by state bodies, institutions, local self-government units and other natural persons and legal entities in cooperation with health care institutions;
3. Promoting and enhancing intersectoral cooperation in the implementation of fundamental public health functions;
4. Promoting and enhancing cooperation among line ministries and local self-government units, and public and private sector and citizens, in the preservation and promotion of population health;
5. Ensuring proper response in the event of public health necessity or emergency and occurrence of extraordinary circumstances;
6. Ensuring implementation of international regulations; and
7. Enshrining provisions for specific public health issues not stipulated by another law.

2.1 Essential public health operations

Essential public health operations constitute a set of functions addressing determinants of health, protecting and guarding population health, and preventing diseases of public health significance, as follows:

- Monitoring and assessment of health and wellbeing among the population;
- Identifying, anticipating, examining and mitigating health-related problems and dangers in the community;

- Health protection, assessment of needs and activities for health protection;
- Disease prevention through preventive measures on primary and secondary level;
- Promotion of health and health education;
- Proposing adoption and implementation of laws and other provisions on health protection, particularly on safe food, water, air, and land and safety at work;
- Provision of competent multidisciplinary public health personnel;
- Supporting and conducting health-related research;
- Development and planning of public health policies;
- Preparedness and management in the event of public health extraordinary circumstances including prevention, reaction and mitigation of consequences; and
- Ensuring intersectoral partnership and community participation for the purposes of promoting health and reducing health inequalities.

The key to realising fundamental public health functions is the cooperation with many stakeholders on all levels: national and local government, competent public-health and scientific research community, industry, business sector, the general public and civil society, thereby including each individual.

2.2 Organisation of the public health system

The public health system, ensuring conditions to preserve and promote population health, represents a network composed of citizens, families, the community, employers' associations, employers, trade unions and employees, health, education, social, cultural and other institutions, means of public information and modern media, humanitarian, religious, sport and other organisations, the insurance fund, units of local self-government, and also state bodies and citizens' associations and foundations taking part in the implementation of the fundamental public health functions.

2.3 Coordination and cooperation

In achieving better coordination and intersectoral cooperation, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia has formed:

The National Council for Public Health as an advisory body for public health issues pertaining to the competences of two or more ministries. The National Council has a chair and 14 representatives from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, Ministry of

Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy, Ministry of Local Self-Government, Institute of Public Health, and independent public health experts. The National Council is chaired by the minister of health.

The vertical implementation of the essential public health operations on a local level includes the **Public Health Councils** established by the local self-government units in the given area. The Council is composed of five members, four representing the municipality and one representing the Centre of public health responsible for the public health operations on its designated territory of several municipalities.

Public Health Councils address issues and policies in public health, prepare opinions, and make initiatives and/or proposals to the bodies of the local self-government units.

3. Establishment and functioning of the Public Health Council in the Municipality of Veles

Pursuant to the Law on Public Health and the Statute of the Municipality of Veles (Official Gazette of the Municipality of Veles No. 12/06, 03/09 and 18/10), on 15 July 2013 a Decision was adopted to establish Public Health Council.

The **Public Health Council** was constituted on 24 October 2013 with five members: one representative of the Centre of Public Health Veles and four representatives of the Municipality of Veles.

The Public Health Council in the Municipality of Veles performs its duties based on adopted Rules of procedure and annual work programme.

The Public Health Council of Veles has the following scope of work:

- The Council monitors the consistency of implementation of the provisions of the Law on Public Health, whereas it prepares and proposes to the Municipal Council programme measures for promoting public health in the Municipality of Veles, in accordance to the established state of play in given areas;
- By reviewing public health issues and policies, the Council passes an opinion in regard to the materials and proposals discussed, and proposes them to the Municipal Council for further consideration and adoption;
- The Council continuously works on the process of collecting and processing data on the status, in order to identify the measures to be taken by municipal bodies and other entities;

- The Council participates in the creation and adoption of municipality's public health development strategy, the municipal programme, etc.

Table 1 gives the activities of the Public Health Council in accordance to its annual work programme.

Table 1. Annual Work Programme of the Public Health Council in the Municipality of Veles for the year 2016

Measures	Time frame	Competent institutions	Indicators	Funds
1. Preventive activities for promotion of population health				
1.1 Monitoring and surveillance of communicable diseases				
Preparation of a Draft Programme with measures for protection of the population against communicable disease	Annually	ULSG and CPH Veles	Adoption of a programme proposal	Budget of the local self-government
Information about the movement of communicable diseases on the territory of the local self-government	Monthly	CPH Veles	Report submission	National annual work programme for public health
Annual information about the movement of diseases in 2015	March 2016	CPH Veles	Information delivery	
1.2 Prevention of communicable disease				
Preventive disinfection, disinsection and deratisation (DDD) in educational institutions	Ongoing	ULSG and CPH Veles	Implementation of disinfection in schools, kindergartens	Budget of the local self-government
Information about DDD in educational institutions in 2015	March 2016	MoES	Information delivery	MoES
1.3 Action plan for control of vector-borne diseases with special accent on mosquitos and ticks				
- Expert opinion with measure proposals and site mapping	Ongoing March 2016	ULSG and CPH Veles	Preparation of an expert opinion with measure proposals	Budget of the local self-government
- Environmental sanitation, cleaning of site and open channels, drying out of still waters and swamps, proper disposal of communal and other waste	Ongoing	ULSG	Site sanitation and drying out of still waters and swamps	Budget of the local self-government
- Education of the population about vector-borne diseases	Ongoing	ULSG and CPH Veles	Preparation and distribution of leaflets	Budget of the local self-government
1.4 Environmental health risk assessment of drinking water quality				
External water monitoring by the public communal enterprise	According to the legislation	ULSG, PCE and CPH Veles	Contract conclusion between PCE and CPH Veles	Budget of the local self-government
Monitoring water safety in local water supplies, village pumps, and the like, not managed by the public communal enterprise	Annually	CPH Veles	Environmental health risk assessment of drinking water	National annual work programme for public health

Measures	Time frame	Competent institutions	Indicators	Funds
1.5 Environmental health risk assessment of surface water quality from a public health aspect				
Sanitation and hygiene inspections with physicochemical and bacteriological analysis of surface waters	Annually	CPH Veles	Information about the sanitation and hygiene status and bathing water quality on the territory of the CPH with measures for sanitation, protection and/or health risk reduction	National annual work programme for public health
2. Health education activity				
2.1 Health education of target groups (educational institutions)				
Social media and their effects on personal health	February - March	CPH Veles	Number of lectures held	Budget of the local self-government
Sexually transmitted infections	April - May	CPH Veles	Number of lectures held	National annual work programme for public health
Physical activity for a healthy life	September - October	CPH Veles	Number of lectures held	
Proper nutrition of young people and health risks from poor nutrition	November-December	CPH Veles	Number of lectures held	
AIDS	December	CPH Veles	Number of lectures held	
2.2 Counselling service on sexual and reproductive health				
Intensifying attendance to counselling services through media promotion	Monthly	ULSG and CPH Veles	Monthly information announcements in the media	No financial implications
2.3 Educational fora				
- Prevention of acute and chronic non-communicable diseases - Activities during childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood - Family planning, and pregnancy and offspring safety	Ongoing	NGOs CPH Veles	Number of fora held	Budget of the local self-government Non-governmental organisations CPH Veles

In its regular line of work, and within the activities for health education of target groups (educational institutions) according to the foreseen dynamics and the topics established in 2016, the Public Health Council, in cooperation with the Centre for Public Health – Veles and NGOs acting within the municipal area, organised a total of 65 lectures in all primary and secondary schools, also including the municipal home for secondary school students.

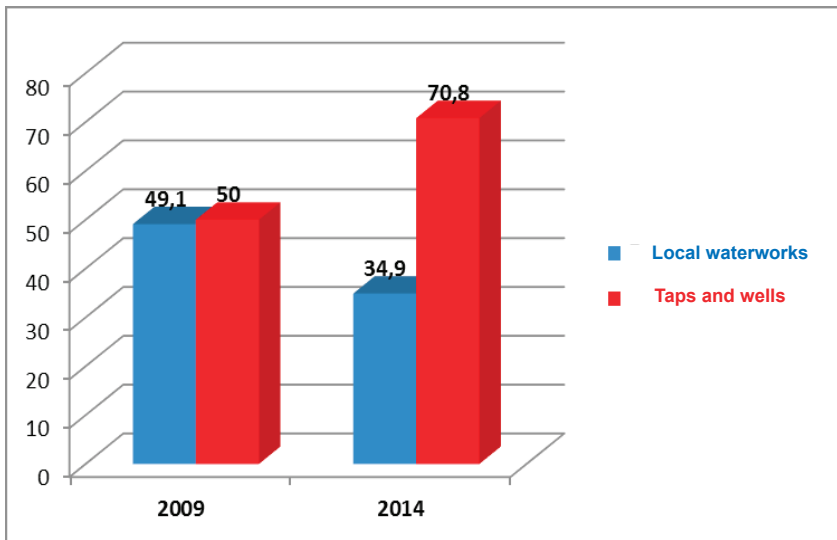
4. Activity of the Public Health Council in Veles

4.1 *Proposals and measures to improve drinking water quality*

According to the national public health programme, the Department of Hygiene and Environmental Health in CPH Veles performs an environmental health risk assessment in regard to drinking water quality through an established safety monitoring of the water in local water supplies, village pumps and wells not managed by the public communal enterprise. Acquired results are delivered by CPH Veles to the Public Health Council – Veles, and then forwarded to the municipal Department of Urbanism and Environment Protection, whereas they are published on the website (www.veles.gov.mk), with specific measures and activities undertaken together with PCE Derven.

Compared to 2009, the water quality and safety of villages with local water supply had some improvement in 2014, owing to the initiatives and activities undertaken by the municipality and the local population (occasional disinfection of drinking water) in line with measure proposals stated by CPH Veles, being directly involved in this process through the Public Health Council.

Diagram 1. Bacteriological failure of drinking water samples (%) in rural areas of the Municipality of Veles, year 2009/2014*



* Process of scorecard preparation for equal access to water and sanitation

The Municipality of Veles saw the preparation of a scorecard for equal access to water and sanitation aimed at improving municipal population's access to quality drinking water. This intersectoral process, implemented at the workshop for equal access to water and sanitation titled "Application of the Scorecard for Equal Access to Water and Sanitation in the Republic of Macedonia", held in January 2016 in Veles, encompassed many local-level institutions: Centre for Public Health Veles, Municipality of Veles, Regional Centre for Social Work – Veles, and the Public Health Council. The scorecard determines drinking water quality, after which proper actions are taken.

4.2 Response to situations potentially causing epidemics

Upon a report made by citizens from Veles, area of Ramina, concerning tick infestation in several households, the Department of Epidemiology in the Centre for Public Health submitted a written report to the Public Health Council about the situation. The Council considered the report and concluded that the health of the population in the area was jeopardised, and therefore, for the threat of epidemics, forwarded the report to the municipal Department of Communal Activities. Specific measures and activities were taken, that is, the municipality performed site sanitation, communal waste cleaning and removal, and, in cooperation with the CPH Veles, it conducted on-site insecticide treatment, and preparation and dissemination of information materials educating the population about vector-borne diseases, also including information on population protection, actions to be taken in the event of such diseases, and means of their prevention. The Council was fully engaged in these activities through monitoring, coordination and expert advice in preparing information materials.

4.3 Intersectoral cooperation and intermunicipal networking for public health

The Municipality of Veles hosted the workshop titled "Together for health for all by 2020: strengthening intersectoral collaboration at local level for health and wellbeing", organised by the Ministry of Health and supported by the World Health Organisation, between 19 and 21 September 2016, in Veles. The goal of the workshop was joining of all sectors and social stakeholders for better communication, coordination and action to promote the health and wellbeing of each and every individual in the community.

Highlighting their joint efforts to continuously invest in the promotion of health and wellbeing as a significant prerequisite for the social people-centred development, as well as the key role the local community and intersectoral actions play across the whole society, Mr Slavcho Chadiev, Mayor of the

Municipality of Veles, and Ms Snezana Chichevalieva, Head of the WHO Country Office in Skopje, opened the workshop, attended by over 70 representatives of institutions from several municipalities including Skopje, Veles, Strumica, Negotino, Gevgelija, Sveti Nikole, Kavadarci and Valandovo, from various sectors, including health and social protection, environment, education, urban planning, crisis management, economy, and non-state actors, such as business sector and civil society. All participants adopted a joint statement for intersectoral cooperation for health and wellbeing as a dedication for better health of all citizens. Regarding the health for all, such statement should serve both as an impetus and an obligation for all sectors of the government, local self-government, and the society as a whole.

Abstract

According to the definition by the World Health Organisation, public health pertains to “all organised measures (whether public or private) to prevent disease, promote health, and prolong life among the population as a whole.”

Public health in the Republic of Macedonia has a long history of providing services and conditions where people can be healthy, thereby focusing on the entire population, not on individual patients or diseases. In the past, such provision of services was referred to as sanitation and hygiene activity, immunisation, epidemiological activity, etc. For the purpose of acquiring global trends, and also awarding special status to this activity in the overall health protection – which, in a wider context, covers preventive and curative services to the individual and population, it was recently renamed “public health”, thus reflecting the separate discipline of providing services and conditions at the level of population and community.

The vertical implementation of the fundamental public health functions includes the **Public Health Councils**, which are responsible for the consistent application of the provisions from the Law on Public Health, in order to promote health and wellbeing of the individual and the local community.

References

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