

Health and the changing of lifestyles

There is an abundance of information about health and wellbeing, but people in Finland are not following experts' lifestyle recommendations. The Finnish population is no longer a single, homogeneous group, but it consists of smaller, diverse groups that vary widely in their information needs and ways and abilities of absorbing new knowledge. A central concern under this theme is to identify different types of groups and their special interests and motivating factors. Research can provide answers to the question of how and in what format information should be tailored and delivered to different groups so that this information is taken on board and so that it translates into lasting health and wellbeing at all stages of the life cycle. New multidisciplinary research is needed into the assimilation of knowledge with a view to enhancing the impact of information about health and wellbeing among all groups of people. Research can help ensure a more effective allocation of society's resources, reduce nursing and healthcare costs and increase equality among citizens.

Economies around the world are increasingly burdened by the same lifestyle diseases, including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and mental health problems. Digitalisation and the rapid advance of health and wellbeing technologies are providing new opportunities for individuals to monitor their health and wellbeing and to change their lifestyles. Health technology is a growing business that is creating new hi-tech jobs in Finland and opening up new export opportunities.

In Finland, huge amounts of money are spent on the treatment of diseases that could be treated and above all prevented by adequate physical exercise, by maintaining active social relations and by following a healthy diet. The costs incurred to healthcare from immobility, through diabetes alone, are substantial. Physical exercise and social relations have significant benefits in promoting mental health, and they can even alleviate the symptoms of depression. There is an abundance of knowledge about lifestyles that promote health and wellbeing, but that knowledge is not put to good enough use. How can people be encouraged to live healthy lifestyles and make healthy choices? How can lifestyle differences between socio-economic groups be reduced? What can the authorities do, what responsibilities do they have? What impact do different instruments of influence and different solutions have, what is their social acceptability? How can individuals be sustainably encouraged to take greater responsibility for their own health?

The integration of research, political direction and execution in the health sector still leaves much to be desired. The Finnish population is divided into groups with very different interests and motivations. Authoritarian education no longer works in this environment of cultural diversity. Research is needed so that information about health and wellbeing can be tailored in such a way that it better reaches and motivates different groups. The aim is to ensure that the information provided is taken on board and that it translates into health and wellbeing at all stages of the life cycle. New multidisciplinary research is needed into the assimilation of knowledge with a view to enhancing the impact of information about health and wellbeing among all groups.

One major challenge for the health sector is to prevent the threat of a lifestyle diseases time bomb. Adult onset type 2 diabetes, for instance, has increased dramatically and in economic terms presents one of the greatest challenges to the national healthcare system. Adult onset diabetes is associated with lack of physical exercise and overweight. There is an abundance of research and advice on the risk factors as well as on how to prevent and treat the disease. Diabetes could provide one possible target group for research where it might be possible to try out new user-driven methods. These methods must take account of interindividual differences, for instance in values, attitudes and needs. Research evidence and the solutions produced can help ensure a

more effective allocation of society's resources, reduce nursing and healthcare costs and increase equality among citizens.

Environments and communities that encourage healthy lifestyles can motivate people to change their ways. Solutions are also needed to support the role of various institutions such as schools, welfare clinics and communities and corporations in changing lifestyles. In particular, research and case examples are needed to identify the most effective approach to translating knowledge into action.

In a digitalising world, knowledge is increasingly transmitted to people directly, for instance through social media. Digitalisation and the rapid advance of health and wellbeing technologies provide new opportunities for individuals to monitor their own health and wellbeing. Health technology is a growing business that is creating new hi-tech jobs in Finland and opening up new export opportunities. Special focus must also be given to the digital divide as a new form of inequality between age groups, for instance, as only part of the people benefit from new technologies.

Research under this theme shall give special attention to mechanisms that, drawing on the results of scientific research over the past decades, can bring about permanent changes in people's behaviour. It is essential to consider the international context and cooperation: what successes have other countries had in the area of health and wellbeing, what lessons have been learned and what could be transferred or applied to Finland? In Finland, research and new practices and procedures developed on the basis of that research have the potential for extensive international demand. When healthy lifestyles become a daily matter of course, health and wellbeing will increase. This will translate into more healthy life years, increased wellbeing in the workplace and longer employment careers, and significantly reduced healthcare expenditure at all stages of the life cycle.