

Dr. Premilla Webster says HEPRO can be an important tool to improve public health.

Dr. Premilla Webster, from the University of Oxford, is regarded as one of the world's leading experts with regards to health profiles. She assists the World Health Organisation in these kinds of questions, and says she is positive to HEPRO (Health and social well being in the Baltic Sea Region):

- The project seems well prepared. We regard the profiles as an important tool to improve public health. The profiles show how the inhabitants regard their own life situation and their local environment. Thus, they can be used to put health questions on the political arena. If the project succeeds, it will be an important contribution to the development of public health work in Europe. I believe that the project will be of great benefit, she says.

According to Webster, it is not always easy to compare statistics on health conditions from different regions, as they are developed in different ways. An important asset to HEPRO will therefore be a joint mapping tool, to be used throughout Europe.

- Health profiles have been proven to be useful tools to improve public health. They contain information that is not accessible through other registers. In addition, they have an interdisciplinary dimension, as a starting point to build alliances when the profiles are followed up afterwards, she says.

Webster has the following recommendations:

- Ideally, a health profile should contain as much information as possible about health conditions in a limited geographical region. A profile must answer questions about lifestyle, and include information about environmental indicators and the social factors affecting our health. It is also essential that the profile be followed up afterwards. In order to reach the potential in a profile, it must be followed up through local strategies, based on central planning. Preferably, local councils should have individual plans for health development, she says.

Webster outlines identifying and analysing health inequalities as the main tasks of a health profile. She also says that a profile must establish indicators that can be used to measure health changes over time, and gives the following advice:

- The information in the profiles should be used to form precise recommendations to the decision makers in society. We must make visible the health regions that need improvement, she points out.

The World Health Organisation cooperates closely with HEPRO. The WHO wants to use the experience from HEPRO to strengthen local democracies and improve public health throughout Europe.

Gives credit to HEPRO

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- We intend to map the health conditions in 32 local councils in Europe through giving the inhabitants the opportunity to personally express how they experience their health situation. We shall use this knowledge to put necessary preventive and health promoting implementations into action. The profiles will eventually form a recipe for efficient public health work, to be used throughout Europe, says project leader Arvid Wangberg.

He underlines the importance of contributing to strengthen local democracies.

- We know that a well developed local democracy has a positive effect on the health situation of its population. Now, we must use the profiles, so that the inhabitants in the participating councils get more influence in their local environment, Wangberg says.