

HEPRO can engage in Eastern Europe in supporting healthy lifestyle change

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Health expert believes HEPRO can set public health work on the agenda in Eastern Europe.

At HEPRO's biannual conference in Saldus in Latvia, Dr Alistair Lipp, an expert adviser from WHO's Healthy Cities Project and a Director of Public Health in the United Kingdom, pointed out that the project has the potential to engage Eastern Europe in supporting healthy lifestyle change. His statement was founded on HEPRO's ability to provide comparative health and lifestyle data across national boundaries, and, thus, contribute to new knowledge that many local and national administrations in Eastern European do not have.

□ HEPRO has the potential to help people in Eastern Europe to understand that the health challenges they are facing can be prevented. There is still time to get ahead of rising levels of chronic diseases by developing preventative activities before or alongside services for treating ill health. This is by far a smarter strategy than the one Western European countries have typically followed, primarily emphasising treatment instead of preventative activities, he pointed out.

Dr Lipp hailed the way HEPRO can inform municipalities about the health and lifestyle needs of their population. We know from our experience with the WHO's Healthy Cities project that municipalities are strongly motivated to follow-up the survey data by developing preventative and other health promoting activities. He also believes it to be an asset to the project that it uses methods to increase the involvement and empowerment of people in the participating municipalities.

□ It has for long been a problem for WHO that we do not have comparative data at local level about how people in different municipalities experience their own health condition. HEPRO can help us solve this challenge. The project fills gaps in our knowledge, he said.

He emphasised the importance of the project informing the municipalities about its local challenges.

□ We know from our work in the WHO Healthy Cities project that this knowledge mobilises politicians to respond to the health and lifestyle needs of their population, because, at the end of the day, investment in preventative and health promoting activities comes down to political value choices. It is, after all, the politicians that choose where to direct our resources, he said.