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Partners in local health. How does the local community work across sectors in formal partnership?

## Partnership for Public Health as a method for local public health development

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### **The Qualities of partnership**

Partnership had become a main strategy in developing Public Health at all levels in the society. This strategy has been used for decades in private business to obtain effectiveness in transactions between different partners working towards a common goal: Benefits for all. Research has been done to identify some variables of quality in partnership. A main strategy in the Norwegian public health development is to implement these qualities in building partnership at all levels; national, regional and local. These qualities are metavariables to be identified in all work done to make a better life for all people.

- Common objectives and strategies
- Added values for all partners
- Commitment for allocation of resources
- Duration in time
- Ability to make decisions
- Evaluation
- Equality

### **Partners in action**

The public health partnership in Norway is established at all levels in society; national, regional and local. A lot of partners will be in action ranging from national to local authorities and Non Governmental Organizations.

At **national** level The Ministry of Health and the Directorate for Health and Social Services is in charge for establish partnership between the other Ministries and other Government Bodies.

At **regional** level different bodies is involved: The Regional Hospital organization, the Social and Welfare regional unit, the Body for Employment and more.

At **County** level the County Councils as the elected Body and the County Governor as the Governments representative to ensure implementation of national Public Health Policy

The **municipalities** will always be the most important arena for action in Public Health.

Non Governmental Organizations as an important partner in people's everyday life

Business life is a new arena for most of us in working with Public Health. It is a new and interesting partner in a broad based Public Health policy.

What about the people? Will they benefit from all these partners?

- National level
- Regional level
- County level
- Municipalities
- Non governmental organizations
- Business life
- The people?

### **Outcome**

The outcome from all public health work is a better life for all members of society despite ethnic background, socioeconomic status or chronic diseases. Partnership is a strategy to obtain these objectives and the outcome of partnership will ensure effectiveness in implementing action for a better health for all.

One of the main outcomes is to ensure a **broad basis** for local public health. In Norway, as in all countries the local community is the main arena for action. Connecting governmental, regional and local partners gives an opportunity to implement a national public health policy the local way.

As the different partners work together they can ensure that all aspects of public Health will be taken into consideration. Cross sectional perspective is important as a basis for action.

**Comprehensiveness** is the result of a broad based and cross sectional perspective. **Added value** is a main outcome when partners identify themselves as stakeholders in Public Health.

A lot of **unexpected alliances** will be seen as the work move forward. Organizations not thinking of themselves as a Public Health Partner will be identified as such. All partners will share a common responsibility of **how community works** and how the directions can be changed to a healthier society for the benefit of the people.

- Broad basis for local public health
- Comprehensiveness
- Added value
- Unexpected alliances
- How communities works

### **Challenges in building partnerships**

It is a lot of challenges in building partnerships – especially to those of us that has a long professional life as public health bureaucrats. In my professional life I have been used to the vertical axis in communication: Somebody near Heaven gives you instructions how to do things despite where you are. Partnership communicates the **horizontal way**: As equal partners we develop a common strategy to obtain the main objectives given by the government, the regional authorities or local communities. The horizontal structure emphasizes equality and processing more than vertical implementation of a national policy. We are going **from the Governmental way of doing things to the Governance way** to do it as part of a European strategy for development in Society. Of course, we have different **roles to play**: The County Governor is in charge for communicating the National Public Health Policy. The County Council as elected body will ensure the People's voice. The Regional Development Plan is in the need for more **credibility** to play an important role in the development of the County and Region. Political action is a critical factor at all levels; national, regional and local. This is emphasized in international policy documents on Public Health: Always ensure a **political involvement** and dedication in the field of Public Health.

- From vertical to horizontal structures
- From government to governance
- Roles to play
- Credibility of the Regional plan for development
- Political actions at regional and local level

### **Example: The partnership “Public Health in Agder”, in Norwegian: “Folkehelse I Agder”**

#### **Values**

The partnership’s values are to be found in all work done and all actions taken in Public Health as “Impressions of Quality”.

The values are:

- Resources
- Coping
- Quality of Life
- Diversity
- Participation
- Empowerment

#### **The process**

The **starting point** for Folkehelse I Agder was made back in 1997 when the County Council of Vest-Agder implemented a plan for public health action as part of the main hospital plan. At that time, health promotion was not addressed by the elected Norwegian county councils but only by the regional government representatives and local communities. Due to this political initiative Vest-Agder Council for Public Health was established as a partnership between regional and local partners in the area. In 2002 a political initiative was taken to unite the two counties into one. Although small, a lot of cultural identity was a main obstacle to this process but the County Councils decided to **cooperate** in the field of Public Health. As part of implementing the Government Paper “Make Norway a healthier Society” the parliament allocated 10.mill Norwegian kroner to build a structure for Public Health at the regional level. A common paper was presented for both **County Councils** to apply for at least some of this money. Successfully, we became one of the five National Lighthouses in Public Health. But: A written paper is not sufficient – you need to meet the politicians face to face in a dialogue to ensure the common understanding for political decisions. Although the City of Arendal is a wonderful City they sometimes behave like the small brother: **Can anything good at all come from Kristiansand?** To sell the idea of partnership in Public Health to politicians at regional and local level was a main task in the process. During spring 2004 we met the County Councils several times to inform about Public Health in general and the benefits for all in working as partners, not as isolated bodies in the same area. The same lesson was to be told for local communities; **as partners we will be strong enough to change people’s health into a healthier direction.**

- Starting Point: Vest-Agder Council for Public Health
- Cooperation between Vest-Agder and Aust Agder Counties
- The political level
- Anything good from Kristiansand?

- How to sell the partnership for administrators and politicians

## Approval

A lot of time and effort was used in processing the partnership at regional and local level. But processing is not enough; the partnership has to be rooted in the formal structures of each partner. It has to be approved in the County Council and all other bodies of the partners. These are:

- The County Councils in the Counties of Aust-Agder and Vest-Agder
- The County Governor in Aust-Agder and Vest-Agder
- The main regional and local hospitals in the two Counties
- Agder College with 5500 students
- 17 of total 30 municipalities consisting of 83% of total number of inhabitants in the two Counties
- 39 NGO's

## Structure at regional level

One of the main purposes in implementing the government's public health policy was to ensure public health as a part of the ordinary political and administrative structure in the region and in the municipalities. Public Health is a new part of the political portfolio of the County Councils in Norway. The partnership needs a political and administrative commitment specially designed for its task. At the regional level, the **political commitment is in the County Councils** and the **administrative commitment** is based in high levels from all partners. A **Steering Group** of ten members from the administrative level is in charge for the long term activities and meet four times per year. The **secretariat** is organized as a Group of four advisers from the County Council and the County Governor working close together virtually on a daily basis meeting once a month in one of the main cities.

- Political commitment by the County Councils
- Administrative commitment at high levels from all partners
- Steering Group of ten members
- Secretariat

## Structure at local level

The municipalities are the main area for action in Public Health. In accordance with Public Health policy the municipalities is given an opportunity to establish a local **public health coordinator** at high level to ensure a cross sectional perspective and action. All 17 municipalities have a **Council for Public Health** with members from different community sectors, NGO's and for some part also from the business area. **Working Groups** will address the main topics such as physical activity, smoking, mental health, alcohol abuse, health in planning and nutrition.

- Public Health Coordinator in the municipalities
- Council for Public Health at local level
- Working groups

## **Demands from local level to regional level**

The municipalities and local communities are the main areas for action in public health. In Norway, as in other Nordic Countries, the local identity is important for people's everyday life. One of the main tasks for the County Councils in Norway is to initiate a regional development plan and implement the national strategies in different areas of society, also in Public Health. The role of the County Councils is to serve the local level in what they need to implement a broad based public health action. We then asked them; what do you need to implement public health policies and action in the municipalities, the NGO's areas and at all In the local community. Here are the answers:

- Inspiration
- Capacity building
- Networking
- New arenas for public health cooperation
- Money

We need **inspiration** in every sense of the word: Public Health is a long term investment and need long term partners.

We need **capacity building** to ensure our work is evidence based. But we also need capacities in processing public health topics in a divided and vertical organized organization where added value is the golden standard.

We need **networking** with our colleagues at local, regional and national level to share the victories and the difficulties.

To give us inspiration, capacity building and networking we need **new arenas for Public Health cooperation**. All partners should meet at least once a year for a two day conference where different topics are to be discussed.

At last – we need **money** to implement all the words into action.

## **Some challenges**

Public Health has, until recently, been seen as a task for the national and local level, not involving the regional level. This is to be changed: The County Councils was invited by the Norwegian parliament (Stringent) to coordinate Public Health planning and action in the regions. Public Health is a new responsibility for the County Councils and they need some time to implement this responsibility into the **Regional Development Plans**. Public Health must be seen as an important factor in building the society equal to investments in education, innovation, broad band electronic highways and activities in culture and arts.

We also need to **sort out the roles** of the different partners at regional level. The County Council is the regional elected body and will take into account the regional aspects in making a Public Health Policy. At the same time, the Governments policies in Public Health should be implemented in all society. It is of great importance that the National Public Health Policy is well rooted in the County Councils and coloured by the regional challenges.

For bureaucrats, **partnership is a new exercise**. It may be quite difficult to go from a vertical way of working as Weber has told us to a horizontal way of working as a true partnership. Equality should be seen in all aspects of partnership and vertical instruction is by no means the way to do it.

At last – we need to **balance two items: Structure and action**. We need structure to ensure that action can be taken in all areas of Public Health. The importance of building Public Health into existing political and administrative structures is a main task for the Norwegian Government. Through partnership this is to be done. The outcome of all structure and

capacity building is action – to assess the needs of people living in local communities and to act. Now!

Than you for your attention.

- Public health as a main part in the portfolio for Regional development
- Sorting out the roles at regional level
- Building partnership is a new exercise for bureaucrats
- Balancing structure and action