

The Nordic Public Health Conference
Public Health – Shared Responsibility

9 – 11 October 2005, Hotel Nordica, Reykjavík, Iceland

Address by Jón Kristjánsson, Minister of Health and Social Security

Madam Chairperson – Ladies and Gentlemen!

It is a great honour for us Icelanders to host the Nordic Public Health Conference for the first time. This is the 8th conference of its kind and when I look back on the topics of the earlier conferences, I find that the topics have always been very important and often had considerable influence on the development of our health services. These past conferences have raised issues of great value for health personnel, administrators and politicians.

At the last conference in Odense 2002, the Public Health Programmes of the Nordic countries were the main theme on the agenda. There we presented our National Health Plan, which is a comprehensive programme where the main targets are clearly defined, ways to reach the goals set and measurements of outcome are carried out regularly.

We have furthermore recently started to update the National Health Plan, with the aim of ensuring continuity as well as reflecting new knowledge and recent developments in priority areas of the programme. This time we have emphasised especially on the involvement of various partners and stakeholders in the decision-making process.

Iceland is a member of the Executive Board of the World Health Organization from 2003 until May 2006 and in 2004 – 2005 our representative, Mr. David Gunnarsson, was chairman of the Executive Board. During that period Iceland, in cooperation with the other Nordic Countries, succeeded in adding public health issues of significant importance to the agenda of the Executive Board and the World Health Assembly.

The fifty-seventh World Health Assembly in 2004 adopted a resolution on Health Promotion and Healthy Lifestyles. This resolution addresses major risks to global health, such as unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, tobacco consumption and harmful use of alcohol. In addition the resolution underlines that promotion of mental health is a vital part of overall improvement of health.

A year later in May 2005 the World Health Assembly adopted a resolution on Public Health Problems Caused by Harmful Use of Alcohol. The European Union and the Nordic Council of Ministers concurrently showed growing interest in preventing alcohol-related harm in Europe as well as globally. However, we have experienced that while priority is given to public health and social considerations, the ongoing liberalisation of trade has weakened the alcohol-policy already agreed upon in international fora.

Currently overweight and obesity present one of the greatest health challenges both globally and in Europe, with particularly alarming trends among children. The World Health Organisation, the European Union, as well as many other institutions and

organisations have placed counteracting measures high on their agendas and support collaboration in combating the epidemic. Health authorities in many countries now address the problem and discuss measures to best deal with the situation, but this current trend of health development has proven difficult to reverse.

I therefore hope that this conference, with its emphasis on the role of the entire community in improving the health of its citizens, will help to provide new ideas and tools in our daily work. The involvement of citizens and various networks in the decision-making and implementation process may be the key to future success.

I hereby declare the 8th Nordic Public Health Conference open.

(Talað orð gildir)