

# **The Health Promotion Advisory Committee**

**Recommendations for Public Health Initiatives to be taken over the next three years**

**June 2005**

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## **Preface**

In the spring of 2005 the Minister for Health and Social Services asked the Health Promotion Advisory Committee to prepare a concrete public health program proposal to implement over the next three years. The Health Promotion Advisory Committee has dealt with this request at several meetings and has prepared the following recommendations.

The proposal for a public health plan is divided into two parts: the statistical part, which shall enable us to track public health statistics; and the practical part, which involves health promotion programs and initiatives.

It is appropriate to mention here that the cost of all these recommendations has not yet been calculated, neither is it specified who is in charge of the specific activities being implemented or who is to pay for them, be it departments, public institutions, local authorities, or private associations or firms. The Health Promotion Advisory Committee recommends that the Minister commence work to clarify these issues.

## Summary and Main Conclusions

A comprehensive program for public health aims primarily at giving 'quality of life' a high priority, at reducing inequalities in health among social classes, and at promoting longevity. This program for public health is divided into two parts: the statistical part, which shall enable us to track public health statistics; and the practical part, which involves health promotion programs and initiatives.

In the coming years, it is the Minister's declared intent to establish efficient control measures to ensure that we have in place the means to track public health statistics, determine how illnesses develop, and monitor risk factors as they relate to the death rate.

It is nearly impossible for preventive disease measures to target the whole population at the same time, but, in years to come, emphasis must be placed on getting people to smoke less, exercise more, and eat more fruits and vegetables.

In short, the recommendations are as follows:

- It is recommended that a study be made of the health status and lifestyles of approx. 3,000 Faroese, chosen at random.
- It is recommended that in 2008, schools, childcare and health service institutions be totally smoke-free.
- By 2008, all educational establishments should have trained quit-smoking course facilitators.
- It is recommended that the price of tobacco increase by 10 DKK per pack annually.
- It is recommended that by 2008, both national and local authorities should have in place a plan for riding bicycles safely in the Faroes.
- It is recommended that both national and local authorities see to it that parking places are situated in one place away from workplaces, so that cars will be parked there and not right outside the various workplaces.
- By the year 2008, one third of all public workplaces must have taken steps to allow employees access to physical exercise during the workday.
- It is suggested that all students are offered one gym period daily.
- It is suggested that every senior citizen is offered organized physical exercise either individually or in groups.
- We should aim for the average Faroese to eat 600 g of fruits and vegetables on a daily basis, not including potatoes.

- In cooperation with the municipalities, the national authorities will see to it that the schools offer their students fruits and vegetables and that all schools provide the students with cold drinking water.
- It is recommended that the multiple programs that the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Committee initiated during the years prior to its being discontinued be resumed.
- It is recommended that every woman between the ages of 50 and 69 be offered a mammogram every third year for early diagnosis of breast cancer.

## **1 Statistics**

In order to obtain more statistics, it is necessary to collect them from all of the health services and to some extent also from areas outside the health services. It is also necessary to combine statistics to make it possible to assess the situation in the Faroes and compare our situation with that in countries with which we would like to be compared. This is already possible by exploiting statistical sources at hand, e.g., the national patient registry, reports from municipal physicians regarding vaccinations, reports to the Chief Medical Officer, death certificates, birth certificates etc.

These statistics are for the most part about the occurrence of illnesses, but the statistical basis is not available to describe the health and lifestyles of people in general, e.g., to portray the health status of the great number of people who never have contact with the health services.

The statistical basis can be obtained by doing the same studies in the Faroes that, e.g., the Danish State's Institute of Public Health has done several times by surveys covering various parts of Denmark and different age groups.

### **1.1.1.Recommendations to implement in 2005**

It is recommended that a study be made of lifestyle, health status and the frequency of disease in 3,000 Faroese chosen at random. Apart from analysing their state of health, the investigation should uncover the need for health services. The investigation also ought to describe habits important to health and the environment, including such things as smoking, alcohol use, physical exercise and diet. If the study is carried out every third year, it will be possible to have an indication of whether and how the status is changing. The estimated cost of such a study is 500,000 DKK. The Department of Occupational and Public Health has the competence to perform such a study.



## **2 Health Promotion Programs**

### **2.1 Designation of Priorities for Health Promotion Programs**

Concerning direct health promotion programs, the Health Promotion Advisory Committee takes the view that it is nearly impossible to address all issues at the same time, but recommends that for the next three years emphasis be put on helping people smoke less, exercise more and eat more fruits and vegetables.

Alcohol- and drug abuse is always a problem with those who have a propensity to become intoxicated or addicted. However, it is less of a problem here than for example in Denmark and Greenland, where people drink a lot more. Continuous activities to discourage the use of alcohol are necessary, however, and furthermore, it is necessary to be alert to the abuse of other drugs such as hash.

The Faroese Road Safety Council is already doing a good job with road safety. The work environment of some of those who work at sea is extremely difficult compared with the work environment that is offered to those who work on land, and, bearing this in mind, the Faroese Maritime Authority ought to give safety at sea a higher priority than it has today. The objective must be that the total work environment for workplaces at sea should not be more dangerous than what is considered reasonable on land. In other words, the authorities in charge of work environments must use the same standards on land and at sea when the issue at stake is the work environment.

Stress is an ever-increasing problem in families with small children, especially for those who work full-time, and, in addition, have work at home. This, however, is such a basic issue with profound repercussions for society that the Health Promotion Advisory Committee considers it to be outside the framework of this proposal.

The Health Promotion Advisory Committee recommends that the government and the parliament consider initiating programs in the following main areas:

- Smoking
- Physical exercise
- Diet
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Breast cancer screening

## **2.2 Smoking**

### **2.2.1 Current status and future initiatives**

The law on smoking stipulates that smoking in public places is banned, however, special smoking rooms, which the Minister for Health and Social Services has the authority to grant exceptions for, are permitted. The number of smokers in the Faroes is fairly high. In 2003, one third of all students in the 9th form smoked as well as a full third of the adult population.

The Health Promotion Advisory Committee takes the view that we should aim at reducing the number of smokers to 20% of children and adults by 2008. The means by which to reach this goal is to increasingly prohibit smoking in all public places. This means that every Faroese shall be ensured that he or she will not unknowingly inhale tobacco smoke.

As far as education and health service employees are concerned, and in connection with all public childcare, a total ban on smoking ought to be put into effect. The reason for this is that these employees, in addition to the work itself, have the special task of being good role models.

Therefore the Health Promotion Advisory Committee recommends that the public administration mandate that employees in the hospital service, in primary health care, in the educational system and at day nurseries, kindergartens and municipal day-care centres do not smoke during working hours. This means that there will be no smoking rooms in these places. Furthermore, children cannot be taken into public day-care in private homes where smoking takes place. The Health Promotion Advisory Committee recommends that this proposal be enacted into legislation.

The Health Promotion Advisory Committee recommends that the Act concerning the work environment and the Act concerning safety at sea be used to help ensure that all workers at sea and on land have a smoke-free environment. Especially at sea, this will imply that it will not be permitted to smoke anywhere inside the vessel, thus it will be necessary to smoke on the deck or in special rooms. This will apply to vessels of all sizes. The Health Promotion Advisory Committee recommends that courses to quit smoking be arranged, and such courses be made available at a reasonable price for smokers. These courses should be offered on a regular basis and municipal physicians shall have the option to send their patients to these courses. This requires that an organized system be worked out.

At the schools, all students who have started smoking shall be offered a quit-smoking course.

The Health Promotion Advisory Committee recommends that smoking be prohibited in sport areas, both indoors and outdoors. If this is not implemented by appealing to the sport's associations themselves, law should mandate a smoking policy.

At hotels, restaurants and in bars all guests must be ensured a smoke-free environment. This means that at hotels all public rooms be made smoke-free, and that smokers be given access to designated guest rooms. In bars, drinks can be served to smokers in places that have no direct connection with the smoke-free part of the establishment. If this cannot be arranged voluntarily, the authorities ought to consider legislation.

Nicotine replacement products should be easily accessible and inexpensive. Nicotine replacement products shall be available at all places where tobacco is for sale – not only at pharmacies.

## **2.2.2 Recommendations to come into force in 2008**

### ***2.2.2.1 A totally smoke-free health- and educational system and smoke-free childcare***

It is proposed that in 2008, schools, childcare institutions and health service institutions will be completely smoke-free. This means that in the areas associated with these institutions, both indoors and outdoors, smoking will be totally banned. Smoking rooms should not be permitted because a smoking room in itself legitimises smoking. To children this is such a twisted signal to give that it cannot be in harmony with the school's role in education. The same principle applies to the public child-care system that takes care of children on behalf of the parents.

Smoking is in itself such a big contradiction to all the activities within the health service that the right of the individual employee and the patient to smoke must yield to the principle of a totally smoke-free environment. The goal must be reached gradually and, if necessary, by legislation. In any case, when the issue is smoking rooms in public buildings, the Minister must bear in mind the special position that institutions dealing with childrearing and health services have. The argument to use schools and the health service sector as pioneers in smoke-free environments is that in the effort to reduce smoking in public places, these two public sectors touch the lives of the majority of the public and are those most closely connected with the problems arising from smoking.

### ***2.2.2.2 Quit smoking programs***

By 2008 all educational institutions should have trained quit smoking course facilitators. This means that suitable persons should have been trained to give courses in how to quit smoking. These courses should be offered to students for free. It must also be arranged so that parents of students who smoke can attend these courses.

The estimated cost is 1 million DDK annually for the first two years. In connection with quit smoking programs for adults, quit smoking course facilitators should be trained in great enough numbers that a visit from a quit smoking course facilitator should be possible in all parts of the country, e.g., at places of work, knitting clubs, beer clubs, sports associations and other associations. The aim is to have a clear policy concerning smokers just as is

the case with alcohol policy. The aim is that in 2008 all these arrangements will function well. To train the instructors will imply a certain cost, information campaigns and helping people make use of these offers will result in some expenses too.

The estimated cost is 1 million DDK annually for the first two years.

### **2.2.2.3 *The price of tobacco***

It is recommended that the price of tobacco rise by 10 DKK per pack annually. This means that the pack price will rise from 45 DKK to 75 DKK in 2008. This price level has been selected to push the price to the limit at which smuggling starts.

### **2.2.3 *Coordination of anti-smoking campaigns***

The four pharmacies in the Faroes have, as a matter of course, competence and health- and nursing services experience. To make such a system work, both at the outset and also as time passes, it is important that there is effective coordination and accountability. It is proposed that the responsibility for this coordination and accountability be given to the Health Promotion Advisory Committee. This means that both appropriations and the right to decision making on how to go about this work will quite literally rest with the Health Promotion Advisory Committee.

## **2.3 Physical exercise**

### **2.3.1 Current status and future initiatives**

There is little doubt that the Faroese people like everybody else in the Western World get too little exercise, and this has serious consequences for their health. On this basis the Health Promotion Advisory Committee will recommend various measures in the coming years regarding exercise for school-age youth, adults and elderly people.

#### **2.3.1.1 Youth**

The Health Promotion Advisory Committee recommends that schools be given the obligation to plan physical exercise for the students. This plan could include both the gym periods and active recesses. The schools should design the school's playground with the goal of physical exercise in mind. It could also be arranged for students literally to "walk to school". It is feasible that safe routes between schools and homes could be planned in many places in the Faroes, i.e. paths could be planned through the outfields or away from busy roads that could connect the school with suitable areas or parking lots where parents could fetch their children or drop them off.

#### **2.3.1.2 Adults**

In the case of adults, it is important to bring about a change of attitude, so that people will walk or ride a bike to and from work. However, riding a bike is too dangerous in some densely populated areas, because cycling is relatively rare in the Faroes. Here the Health Promotion Advisory Committee recommends to the authorities that they consider making bicycle paths and possibly consider using part of sidewalks for cyclists.

As for workplaces, a number of measures could encourage physical activity. For example, fitness rooms could be provided to employees, especially onboard fishing vessels, which are at sea for long time periods. Good bathing and changing facilities would encourage physical activities both outside and at work.

Both public and private employers ought to initiate a policy of exercise or a policy that aims to increase employees' energy levels. This might be a plan to provide people with exercise possibilities during the lunch hour and a plan that gives them access to appetising, low-calorie food.

Another option is for employers to distribute pedometers, so that people or companies can compete with each other for the most physically active employees. This could also be used at schools for competitions among students, classes and with other schools.

More public information ought to be available regarding existing walking-paths both in towns and in villages. Paths must be marked clearly and the distances given on signs etc. It ought to be noted too that people pushing a pram do not always have the possibility to wheel along paths made for pedestrians.

### **2.3.1.3 Senior Citizens**

For senior citizens, a physical exercise plan should be created that could postpone the time that home care becomes necessary. Ordinary activities should be organized like short daily walks either individually, together with home care staff, or in groups arranged by staff in the vicinity of care homes.

## **2.3.2. Recommendations to be implemented by 2008**

### **2.3.2.1 Cycling Initiatives**

Currently, it is not easy to take up cycling in the Faroes because we have neither a network of safe-cycling roads between villages nor within villages. Cycling, however, is a fine means of transport, also in the Faroes. Development is mostly confined to the coastal areas in the Faroes and as a consequence there is little elevation gain. It is recommended that by 2008 the municipalities be required to make a plan for safe cycling in the Faroes.

This implies that existing roads either be widened to allow the creation of cycling paths or that it becomes legal to cycle on the sidewalk. If this is the case, it will be necessary to make certain rules for the cyclists. When new roads are planned, cycling paths must, as a matter of course, be part of future projects. Potential collaborators in this matter include the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Faroese Road Safety Council, Government engineers and also municipalities and municipal organizations.

### **2.3.2.2 Initiatives to promote**

It is proposed that national and local authorities see to it that parking for workplaces is combined in one lot at some distance from workplaces, so that cars will be parked in that place and nowhere near the workplaces. This means that people must walk between the parking lot and their places of work. This could result in their walking all the way from home to work. This should not cause any problems because, in most cases, the distance between residences and workplaces is short. Most people have no trouble walking and physical exercise would become a natural part of the working day.

### **2.3.2.3 Physical exercise at work**

By 2008, one third of all public workplaces shall have taken steps to provide their employees with access to physical exercise throughout the workday. Just like in schools, which have gymnasiums for use by students, public employees would benefit from participating in exercises promoting physical strength – both physical fitness and agility exercises - while at work.

We can think in terms of fitness rooms at the workplace itself, but it could also be that fitness programs arranged by the employer would take place in gymnasiums and other fitness venues outside the workplace. In other words, by 2008 one third of all public workplaces ought to have implemented a concrete policy for promoting physical exercise at work, thus, both improving

the health of individuals and increasing their productivity. It is obvious that this measure is aimed primarily at those who work sitting most of the time i.e. people doing office work.

Hopefully, such measures in the public sector will encourage the private business sector to take similar action. Employees of filleting plants, for example, have an unvaried work tempo and greatly need physical exercise to prevent disability caused by this type of work.

#### ***2.3.2.4 School initiatives – a gym period every day***

It is proposed that all pupils have at least one gym period every day. This should be possible because all schools have gymnasiums and teachers who organize these classes. The objective is that all pupils exercise and do gymnastics one hour daily. By 2008, appropriations should provide funding to the schools to cover the increased number of classes.

#### ***2.3.2.5 Exercise for senior citizens***

It is essential for the well being of older people to keep their bodies active, and to prevent this age group from being isolated from their peers. Therefore it is proposed that all senior citizens be offered exercise either individually or in groups. In clubs for senior citizens or at day-care centres, exercise activities such as walks or other physical exercises can be arranged. Exercise can also be encouraged as a treatment offering arranged by professionals. Home care employees ought to be in charge of this. If people keep fit and agile, it can postpone their requirement for help i.e. from Home Care.

Such a fitness offering is a natural part of the Home Care field of work, thus, it is proposed that by 2008, it be a routine part of Home Care's offering. It will be a bit more expensive in the beginning, but it is expected that savings for nursing costs will soon become apparent.

## **2.4 Diet- Current status and future initiatives**

The Health Promotion Advisory Committee recommends that in the coming years significant initiatives be taken to get Faroese to eat more fruits and vegetables. A campaign in Denmark to encourage Danes to eat at least 600 g of fruits or vegetables a day, potatoes not included, has been successful. The Health Promotion Advisory Committee recommends that an advertising campaign be initiated to encourage people to change their eating habits so that the eating of fruit and vegetables will more and more supplant the eating of unhealthy food.

An advertising campaign should also target workplaces to encourage them to offer their employees free fruits and vegetables or to encourage groups of employees to organize healthy food options for their lunch breaks.

In schools, water-fountains ought to be installed, and, furthermore, all students in the Faroes should have access to fruits and vegetables instead of sweets and junk food.

It is recommended that school authorities and / or teacher- and parent organizations talk about food programs in schools, e.g., packed lunches and food availability in the classes, one or more times per week. This collaboration should result in identifying the most appropriate lunch break and the best food environment to have at a school.

### **2.4.2 Recommendations for initiatives to be taken by 2008**

#### **2.4.2.1 Food choice initiatives**

Our goal is for Faroese in general to eat 600 g of fruits and vegetables daily, potatoes not included. It is recommended that we plan the same campaign that Danish health authorities have carried out in recent years. The Danish media campaign used the slogan: "six a day" [This slogan is a word play on the words sex and six, which are similar in the Danish language.] If an apple or an orange weighs approx. 100 grams, it is easy to figure out how many to eat each day. As the demand for fruits and vegetables increases, it is hoped that the supply of these items in villages, where it can be difficult to obtain fresh food now, will increase.

It is understood that such a campaign to encourage people to eat more fruits and vegetables will target school-age youth, working adults and senior citizens who have left the labour market.

This campaign includes encouraging arrangements at workplaces for fruits and vegetables to be offered to employees or arrangements where employees themselves organize and do the shopping. A media campaign such as this one will cost approx. 500,000 DKK from now until 2008.



#### ***2.4.2.2 Water, fruits and vegetables in primary schools***

In cooperation with the municipalities, the national authorities will arrange for schools to offer their students fruits and vegetables, and, in addition, all schools will provide students with cool drinking water. This plan is expected to already be in place in 2005 and 5 million DKK were set aside for this campaign in 2005.

## **2.5 Alcohol, drugs and self-destructive behaviour**

### **2.5.1 Status and future initiatives**

On average, every Faroese over the age of 15 drinks a little less than 7 litres of pure alcohol annually. This is equivalent to the amount consumed in the rest of the Nordic countries, exclusive of Denmark and Greenland. The consumption of alcohol in the Faroes has increased a little since the alcohol monopoly was established, but not significantly. It is necessary to continually keep watch on consumption and especially on abuse. For this we currently have knowledge of the number of citizens requiring treatment for alcohol use in the health service or at specialized institutions like Heilbrigdi (home for alcoholics) or Bláakrossi (the Blue Cross).

As far as hash is concerned, the Health Promotion Advisory Committee has reached the conclusion that more than one hundred people most likely use this drug on a daily basis. This is the tip of the iceberg. This indicates that even on these remote Faroe islands, hash is fairly common and easy to come by. Furthermore it is possible to obtain harder drugs.

Based on an anonymous survey among students in the 9th form, an unexpectedly surprising number have considered harming themselves, and they are also burdened with suicidal thoughts. This indicates that a portion of our youngsters have problems coping with life. Therefore, the Health Promotion Advisory Committee is of the opinion that it is crucial to undertake a campaign especially targeting 8th form students and their parents, as well as upper secondary schools. The themes of this campaign should be the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse and life's problems and challenges.

### **2.5.2 Practical initiatives targeting alcohol and drugs for 2008**

It is recommended that the multiple campaigns organized by the Drug and Alcohol Abuse Committee prior to its being discontinued be resumed. This committee was in charge of a well-organized and quite extensive variety of activities, involving both alcohol policy at workplaces and drug-related problems among children and adults. Approx. 300 teachers received supplementary training to be able to teach using planned instructional materials. In addition, both public and private institutions were offered instruction and guidance; but the emphasis was on schools, targeting children and those at the upper secondary level including technical and vocational schools.

It is recommended that the same activities be resumed as of 2006.

## **2.6 Cancer Screening**

### **2.6.1 *Current status and future initiatives***

For the past ten years, we have offered Faroese women between the ages of 25 and 70 pap smears to screen for cervical cancer. This arrangement seems to work satisfactorily.

However, there has been no mammogram availability in the Faroes to screen for breast cancer. According to the Danish health authorities, the proof that this screening is beneficial to public health is quite reliable, and, thus, the National Board of Health recommends that all women in Denmark between the ages of 50 and 69 be offered a mammogram every three years.

### **2.6.2 *Recommendation on breast cancer screening to be implemented in 2007***

It is recommended that all women between the ages of 50 and 69 be offered a mammogram every three years to detect potential cancer at an early stage.

It is recommended that transportable equipment be purchased and that the x-ray films be sent abroad for reading to centres specialized in this type of analysis.

The Health Promotion Advisory Committee recommends that already by 2005 a committee be set up to determine the equipment needed and the best way to organize this type of screening. The committee is also to estimate the cost so a proposal for an appropriation can be put into the 2007 budget.