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Dear Colleagues,

this has been a dynamic Spring for all of us with thought-provoking meetings and workshops, active project work, and new projects' kick-offs. In this Newsletter, we share some of the work done and what is yet to come. We begin with the highlights from the latest meetings and continue with updates on our project progress.

Last but not least, the NDPHS Secretariat wishes you all a great Summer!

Highlights from the meetings of the NDPHS governing bodies on May 7-8 in Vilnius, Lithuania



The NDPHS Family photo, Vilnius, Lithuania

[The EUSBSR Policy Area Health Steering Group](#) meeting was held on May 7 in sunny Vilnius, Lithuania. The NDPHS Secretariat extends our gratitude to the Lithuanian colleagues for hosting us and Ms. Elīza Bērziņa for chairing the meeting.

Among the general updates, Dr. Ülla-Karin Nurm from the **NDPHS Secretariat** announced the newly approved Interreg Central Baltic-funded project **SAFE - Solutions for Age-Friendly Employer** and a planned **workshop on transferability of social innovation** with a focus on sustainable and healthy working lives. The workshop will take place in Stockholm in September 2024. More information will follow. The participants welcomed Ms. Inga Surgunte from our Interreg BSR-funded project **Arts on Prescription in the Baltic Sea Region**. Ms. Surgunte introduced a novel approach to addressing mental health at the community level in Latvia through results from the first round of piloting. The project work continues and you can read more about it in the project section of this Newsletter. Another of our ongoing projects **MentalHealthMatters** is also reaching new milestones. Steady progress has been made on the journey towards developing a Roadmap for the improvement of OSH policy and education and a First Aid Kit to support small and medium-sized enterprises in addressing psychosocial risks. Scroll down to read more.



Mr. Pekka Jousilahti, a member of the NDPHS **Non-Communicable Diseases Expert Group**, presented the results of the **Potential Years of Life Lost** study that has been extended to include data until 2021. Lastly, participants welcomed Ms. Elena Kolosova and Ms. Marta Ślęzak-Warszycka from the [Interreg Baltic Sea Region Joint Secretariat](#) who facilitated the Interreg post-2027 consultation. The participants shared their suggestions on the priority health topics for transnational cooperation and the challenges they experience or envision. The discussion was concluded on a positive note acknowledging the value of the programme to accommodate a broad variety of health-related projects.

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[The NDPHS Committee of Senior Representatives](#) meeting took place the next day on May 8. The participants were warmly welcomed by the NDPHS Chair, Ms. Radvilė Jakaitienė from the Ministry of Health of Lithuania.

During a half-day meeting, the NDPHS Secretariat, Partners, and Expert Groups exchanged information about their work and thematic priorities.

Cooperation with Ukraine, crisis response, and emergency preparedness were highlighted as important avenues for further developments. The meeting adopted the NDPHS Work Plan 2024 and the NDPHS Progress Report 2023.

The next meeting of the NDPHS governing bodies is planned in Vilnius, Lithuania on 20-21 November. Further communication will follow.



Updates from the Expert Groups

[The Expert Group on Alcohol and Substance Use](#) (ASA) gathered in Stockholm from May 28 to 29. The meeting was hosted by our colleagues from the Public Health Agency of Sweden and the Interim Chair Ms. Jelena Talackiene from the Ministry of Health of Lithuania. In addition to our Partnership's country representatives, we welcomed guests from the [WHO Regional Office for Europe](#) who shared the latest data on challenges related to novel tobacco and nicotine products and updates regarding alcohol policy in the region.



ASA EG, Stockholm, Sweden

All participating countries gave a presentation on their recent developments in the field of alcohol, tobacco, other substance use, and gambling. Overall alarming data on **novel nicotine product addiction growth, concerning and contradictory alcohol policy developments, and surveillance challenges** have been observed across the Baltic-Nordic region. Followed by the country presentations on the second day, experts from the Oslo University Hospital and Nordic Welfare Centre shared the status of two respective projects: "Harmful alcohol use – prevalence and intervention for hospitals in the Baltic Region and Norway" and "Integration into the labour market of adults with addiction problems or substance abuse – a Nordic insight" which led to good discussions.

Active participation and engagement from the experts once more reaffirmed the value of the NDPHS network. In particular, all participants acknowledged the advantage of having the information and data from the region when advocating for and building policy recommendations nationally. In addition, the NDPHS expert network was recognized as a reliable and longstanding resource for strengthening and supporting research groups on the topics.

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ASA EG, Stockholm, Sweden

[The Expert Group on Occupational Safety and Health](#) (OSH) held its meeting and the 3rd Transnational Workshop of the **MentalHealthMatters** project from March 19 to 20 in Helsinki. The workshop was hosted by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health and the EG Chair Mr. Owe Österbacka.



MentalHealthMatters 3rd Transnational Workshop, Helsinki, Finland

During two dynamic days, the project partners and invited guests delved deeper into the education and training of employers and OSH professionals on mental health-related risks and resources at work. Following the national presentations, the project partners divided into two sessions on the project's main outputs: the online **First Aid Kit** and the **Roadmap**. These materials will aim to support small and medium-sized enterprises in addressing psychosocial risks and taking preventive action. The Roadmap will detail needed improvements and practical proposals for reform in OSH policy, regulations, education, and practice at the national and international levels.

All partners continue their work on respective outputs and will meet again in May to wrap up the national findings and to pinpoint the value of transnational work on the topic. **The outcomes will be further explored during a transferability workshop in September** where we will develop ways how to share and adapt the best national practices from county to country in our region.

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MentalHealthMatters[Visit MentalHealthMatters project page](#)

[The Expert Group on HIV, Tuberculosis, and Associated Infections](#), under the leadership of its new Chair, Ms. Tuula Vasankari, convened virtually on March 12th. The main purpose of the meeting was to share recent developments in the sector in the partner countries and to introduce the project on the **Latent Tuberculosis Infection Inventory (LTBI) financed by the Ministry of Health and Care Services of Norway**. The project implementation will continue until December 2025. The project team will assess and provide an overview of the approaches used by NDPHS Partner countries in managing LTBI, comparing them with existing WHO and ECDC guidelines. **The action aims to inform policy-makers about the importance of LTBI diagnosis and management and encourage them to strengthen relevant measures across various levels.** By intensifying the data gathering and research and ultimately producing a report on the gaps, barriers, challenges, and needs in connection to LTBI diagnosis and management, the project will contribute to the achievements of the WHO End TB Strategy. **It is foreseen that policy briefs and recommendations will increase cooperation on the topic between our Partner countries and Ukraine.**

The NDPHS Secretariat congratulates the Expert Group on a successful project application and funding. The project is a joint effort by the Finnish Lung Health Association, the Norwegian Institute of Public Health, the NDPHS Secretariat, and the members of the EG on HIV, TB & AI.

New project "Solutions for Age-Friendly Employer" (SAFE) receives funding from Interreg Central Baltic Programme



SAFE project kick-off meeting, Tallinn, Estonia

In our previous Newsletter, we talked about the plans to explore new opportunities and external funding for our thematic work, today we are pleased to announce the positive results of these efforts. To advance the **NDPHS and PA Health work on promoting active and healthy ageing** and as a step towards implementing the NDPHS [“Roadmap to improve the health and well-being of the ageing population”](#), we are glad to announce **the launch of a project "Solutions for Age-Friendly Employer" (SAFE) funded by Interreg Central Baltic Programme**. The project consortium consists of the Tallinn University Haapsalu College in Estonia as a lead partner together with a non-profit organization Golden League in Estonia, Metropolia University of Applied Sciences in Finland, and the NDPHS Secretariat. The SAFE project aims to increase employment opportunities for people aged 55+ specifically focusing on the health and wellness sectors.

In this project, we support the construction of age-friendly work communities without forgetting the different generations. The project is planned to last for 3 years and the kick-off meeting was held on April 15 in Tallinn, Estonia. The project has the potential to make a valuable contribution to the work of the NDPHS Expert Groups on OSH and PHC and enrich our work on active and healthy ageing and mental health. Stay tuned!

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PA Health and PA Education joint workshop: Creating Innovative Solutions by Engaging in Cross-sectoral Collaboration in the Baltic Sea Region



The project partners of the **Economy of Well-being of People** organized an online workshop on 13 March. The event was a building block in the process of strengthening collaboration in the Baltic Sea region that facilitates connections between governments, healthcare and social service providers, private sector, academia, and civil society. The participants were introduced to a methodology's framework for cross-sectoral collaboration developed by Riga Stradins University in Latvia. **Defining the right partners, clear network performance indicators, and developing a mechanism for ensuring the dissemination and transferability of the results were highlighted as the basis for ensuring network viability.**

During the second session of the workshop and considering the presented methodology, the participants reflected on how it could be applied and beneficial to the work on the following focus areas proposed by PA Health and PA Education:

- **Ageing populations, Ageism, and Intergenerational communication;**
- **Lifelong learning and Occupational health and safety;**
- **Mental health and loneliness.**

[PA Health](#) continuously advocates for the **Economy of Well-being** concept which aims to put people and their wellbeing at the centre of policy and

[Click here to read more](#)

"Arts On Prescription" partners review the first completed pilot phase



Arts on Prescription project meeting, Turku, Finland

The Interreg Baltic Sea Region project's **Arts on Prescription** (AoP) partners gathered in Turku on 13-14 February to review the first completed pilot phase of the AoP concept and to develop adjustments to its design.

During the first pilot phase, partners tested the approach of facilitated group classes that introduced participants to artistic and cultural activities in their community over several weeks. The activities were organized in cooperation with museums, adult education centers, and cultural institutions in Denmark, Germany, Poland, Latvia, and Sweden. During the two-day meeting, particular attention was paid to:

- exchanging experiences between the piloting partners on lessons learned on topics such as recruiting participants, selecting suitable venues and

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activities, and meeting the needs of different target groups;

- the evaluation of the local AoP programmes;
- advancing the work on the **Online Practitioner's Guide**. The guide will be a tool to support others who would like to facilitate and learn about AoP and facilitate programmes adapted to their local context.

The project partners enjoyed an opportunity to try out an Arts on Prescription session themselves during a workshop led by dance ambassadors and cultural wellbeing workers from Turku, Finland.

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Arts on Prescription

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Policy Area Health

PA Health joins the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region Annual meeting in Hamburg

From February 6 to 8 all Policy Areas coordinators together with National Coordinators met in Hamburg to generate ideas of synergies and to lay out plans on how to increase cross-policy work that is impactful and of relevance in the future.



EUSBSR Annual meeting, Hamburg, Germany

During brainstorming sessions, the participants discussed how to better advocate for the Strategy in times of high competitiveness and how to best prepare for the new Action Plan period. **The participants identified gaps and potentials in the work across different Policy Areas with one overarching focus – one of the most pressing challenges of our times – climate change.** A challenge that undeniably affects also peoples' well-being and presents a threat to our health. As the Policy Area Health coordinator, we promote policies that put people's health and well-being in the center and advocate for a Well-being Economy as a response to some of the challenges including climate crisis, biodiversity loss, resource depletion, declining mental health, and security. The meeting conclusions are being integrated into the PA Health focus for the Action Plan update where we outline expected measurable results and our cross-policy work.

Lastly, the NDPHS Secretariat team would like to announce the departure of our team member, Policy Officer, Imants Gross. It was a great pleasure working with Imants and we wish him all the best in his future endeavors.



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