



CONCLUSIONS BY THE CHAIR

The Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS) held its seventeenth Annual Conference (PAC) on 14 November 2025. Dr. Laimutė Vaidelienė, Vice-Minister of Health of Lithuania, hosted and chaired the Conference. High-level representatives responsible for health and social affairs participated in the PAC.

The PAC appraised the progress of the NDPHS since the last Conference held on 17 January 2024. The Conference discussed the NDPHS's strategic direction for the upcoming two-year period, chaired by Norway and co-chaired by Finland, and beyond, as well as the Partnership's contribution to strengthening mental health.

Progress in 2024-2025

The PAC acknowledged with appreciation the progress that the Partnership has made towards its vision of leading the way to sustainable and inclusive societies with equal opportunities for good health and well-being for all throughout the life course, in line with its mission of providing an inclusive cross-sectoral platform for health advocacy.

The efforts of coordinating the Policy Area "Health" within the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), especially in promoting the "Health in All Policies" approach, have yielded results. In this forum, health is now increasingly recognised by other sectors as a natural partner, rather than as a siloed area of life limited to doctors' offices and hospitals.

In particular, during the last two years, the Partnership has significantly stepped up its project implementation activities. Projects with NDPHS involvement and leadership are directly channelled to stakeholders in Partner Countries, supporting on-the-ground initiatives and directly contributing to regional and national development goals, demonstrating significant added value and yielding returns many times higher than the initial investment.

The PAC acknowledged that the NDPHS remains a distinctive platform for social innovation, advocacy and public health policy development. Through facilitating transnational exchanges, collaborative initiatives, and cross-sectoral dialogue within the framework of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, the NDPHS contributes to exploring innovative approaches, generating evidence, learning from neighboring countries, and fostering consensus on critical issues.

The NDPHS Expert Groups create a unique space for peer-level exchange, breaking down silos between countries, enabling mutual learning, and fostering collaboration without barriers.

NDPHS Strategic direction in 2026-2027

The PAC reaffirmed that the existing cooperation has proven its value as a unique platform for expert-level collaboration, policy exchange, and regional solidarity. These long-standing, trust-based relationships between experts and institutions, built over the past 22 years, generate synergy, allowing one country's experience to benefit others.

As the Policy Area Health Coordinator within the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, this cooperation has led to more synchronized efforts in health and well-being. It has involved other sectors, delivered measurable results, and generated a significant return on investment from project funding for stakeholders across all partner countries, with added value exceeding partner contributions to the Secretariat by almost seven times.

At the same time, the PAC acknowledged the need to adapt. The context for regional cooperation has undergone a fundamental shift. The PAC firmly condemned the Russian Federation's illegal, unprovoked, and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine. Consequently, all forms of collaboration and engagement with the Russian Federation have been terminated. In a time of limited resources and competing priorities, the Partnership reaffirmed that its efforts must remain focused, impactful, and aligned with the most pressing regional needs — including its steadfast support for Ukraine and facilitating the integration of Ukrainian stakeholders into regional collaboration frameworks.

As the Partnership evolves, it will continue to build from its solid foundation. It will keep strengthening capacity and supporting knowledge exchange across borders; facilitating timely and relevant information sharing with policymakers and practitioners; and enabling new methods of collaboration among various stakeholders and sectors.

The Partnership will focus its efforts on areas where it has demonstrated strength and can bring added value, such as mental health, alcohol, tobacco, and substance use, occupational safety and health, infectious diseases, in line with the renewed NDPHS Strategy 2023–2027.

The incoming Norwegian Chair and Finnish Co-Chair will lead a strategic review of the Partnership's focus and functioning and, with support of the NDPHS Secretariat, prepare a roadmap for clarifying all open questions regarding the legal and political framework of the Partnership.

Mental health and well-being

The PAC underlined the importance of strengthening mental health as a cornerstone of resilient and inclusive societies in the Baltic Sea Region. Delegates welcomed the adoption of a Statement on Mental Health at this Conference and acknowledged the Partnership's role in advancing innovative approaches and translating them into policy.

The PAC highlighted the successful thematic side-event “Acting on Health: the Role of Arts in Wellbeing,” which marked the culmination of the Interreg BSR-funded Arts on Prescription project. By piloting arts-based models across several countries, the project has demonstrated how cultural activities can promote mental health, reduce feelings of loneliness, and foster community connections.

Looking ahead, the PAC emphasized the importance of sustaining and expanding such approaches through long-term structures. In this regard, the Conference welcomed the establishment of the NDPHS-led Baltic Sea Region Mental Health Platform, recognized by Interreg BSR Programme as an Operation of Strategic Importance. This platform will provide a framework for knowledge exchange, scaling up best practices, and ensuring that regional cooperation continues to strengthen resilience and wellbeing across the Baltic Sea Region, in line with the NDPHS Strategy 2023–2027 and global health commitments.

Final provisions

The PAC expressed its appreciation to the NDPHS Expert Groups, the NDPHS Secretariat, the Committee of Senior Representatives, and project consortia for their excellent work and support to the Partnership during the Lithuanian Chairship. The PAC also thanked Sweden for hosting the NDPHS Secretariat.

The PAC appointed Norway as the Partnership Chair and Finland as the Co-Chair for the period of 1 January 2026 – 31 December 2027.

The PAC noted that the next ministerial-level Partnership Annual Conference is planned to be held in Oslo, Norway, in 2027, and looked forward to reconvening to take stock of progress and further strengthen regional cooperation on health and wellbeing.