



World Health  
Organization

## Global Knowledge Network for Health Equity

### Case Study:

#### **Iceland: Wellbeing for All in a Health-Promoting Community**

**Issue:** Iceland has identified the burden of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), mental health, and musculoskeletal problems as significant health challenges, of which risky patterns in alcohol consumption among adults and high levels of obesity are examples of major risk factors. These issues are exacerbated among sub-groups who struggle to make ends meet.<sup>1-3</sup>

**Response:** To address these public health challenges, Iceland adopted a Health in All Policies (HiAP) approach, strengthened by Wellbeing Economy efforts, tailored to its unique context and connected to key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Central to this approach is the Health-Promoting Communities (HPC) initiative, Iceland's national network for WHO Healthy Cities, which supports communities, including all school levels, to create environments that promote healthy behaviors and lifestyles, health and wellbeing for all. The HPC initiative focuses on allocating funding and resources to actions that significantly impact wellbeing and is grounded in comprehensive, data-driven approaches involving active participation from various sectors and levels of governance.<sup>4,5</sup> The cities of Reykjavik and Mosfellsbær were the first local governments to implement it in 2013, and by 2023, it has expanded to cover over 95% of the population.<sup>6</sup>

**Progress:** Significant achievements include the integration of public health indicators into local and national policy discussions, which are published annually for all health districts and major municipalities. These reports help identify overall strengths and challenges, allowing for the detection of vulnerable sub-groups and the tailoring of interventions to meet specific community needs. Seven co-created checklists have been developed, addressing key determinants of health and wellbeing, facilitating intersectoral collaboration, and enabling the digital monitoring of progress.<sup>7, 8</sup>

**Lessons on Health in All Policies:** Key lessons learned highlight the importance of robust governance and structured intersectoral collaboration. Establishing steering groups at both national and local levels has been crucial for coordinated public health work. These groups, which include representatives from municipal departments, primary health care, and NGOs, focus on addressing health trends based on annually published data. A collaborative approach, characterized by cross-sector cooperation and openness to shared learning, has been vital. Furthermore, ongoing efforts to integrate health impact assessments into decision-making processes contribute to sustainable health promotion efforts despite changes in government. The Directorate of Health in Iceland has been pivotal in this process, coordinating efforts and providing tools such as indicators and online checklists to guide local actions.<sup>8</sup>

Iceland's HPC initiative demonstrates a strong commitment to improving wellbeing through holistic, community-focused programs, showcasing the effectiveness of collaborative governance and comprehensive public health strategies.

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### **Disclaimer**

*These case studies were developed based on the presenters' materials and discussions during the [“Health in All Policies: Advancing Multisectoral Collaboration for Health Equity” Webinar](#) in June 2024. The information provided here reflects a summary of the content of their presentations and may not include all necessary sources or citations. The views expressed do not necessarily represent the position of the World Health Organization (WHO). For further details, please refer to the original sources or directly contact the presenters.*

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