



Kaunas Region, Lithuania

“Girl” on Central
Park Sculpture Trail,
Birštonas, Kaunas
Region (by Sculptor
Romas Kvintas)

General overview

The Kaunas Region is located in the centre of Lithuania and covers an area of 8086 km². It is subdivided into eight municipalities: Birštonas town, Kaunas city, and the Jonava, Kaišiadorys, Kaunas, Kėdainiai, Prienai and Raseiniai districts. The municipalities vary considerably in size, the largest being Kaunas city with 292 691 citizens (1). The total population of the Kaunas Region is 569 875.

Life expectancy in the Kaunas region is 75.6 years (80.6 years for women and 70.2 years for men) (2). The main reasons for death in the Kaunas region are similar to those for the country as a whole, namely, cardiovascular diseases (Kaunas region: 690.2/100 000; Lithuania: 718.8/100 000), malignant tumours (Kaunas region: 261.5/100 000; Lithuania: 246.7/100 000) and external causes of death (Kaunas region: 120.0/100 000; Lithuania: 123.1/100 000) (3).

Other indicators listed in the Health Indicators of Lithuania database are also important in rating health disparities in the Kaunas Region. A detailed analysis carried out in 2016 showed noticeable differences between the municipalities. For example:

- the lowest rates of morbidity from type II diabetes mellitus were found in the Kaunas and Kaišiadorys districts (39.2–41.6/10 000), the highest rates were found in Kaunas city and the Jonava district (61.5–62.5/10 000), while the average rates for the Kaunas Region and the whole country were, respectively, 50.3/10 000 and 45.6/10 000;
- the lowest rates of social-risk families were found in Kaunas city (1.5–2.5/1000 population), the highest rates in the districts of Raseiniai and Prienai (6.2–6.8/1000), and the average rates for the Kaunas Region and the whole country were, respectively, 4.5/1000 and 3.4/1000 (3).

There are five universities in the Kaunas Region, three of which are involved in activities related to health promotion: the Lithuanian Sports University, the Aleksandras Stulginskis University (both directly involved as members of the Health Promoting Universities network in Lithuania), and the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences (indirectly involved).

The Kaunas Region is not an administrative unit as there are no regional decision-making administrative authorities in Lithuania, and there are no regional taxes. The Kaunas Regional

Development Council, a collegial body comprising representatives of the public and the local authorities, has the legal authority to take decisions on important problems relating to the municipalities, or the Region as a whole, approve the regional development plan, and provide recommendations to the Ministry of Interior and other national institutions. The Council is approved by the Minister of the Interior within three months of the municipal council elections that take place every four years.

In 2012, the Kaunas Regional Development Council made the decision to participate in Regions for Health Network (RHN) and, to this end, established the Health Promoting Kaunas Region Working Group. The Group is comprised on a parity basis, each municipality having the right to delegate two representatives (physicians, representatives of public health bureaus, politicians).

Since 1996, Lithuania has had compulsory national health insurance, which consists of employers', state-budget and personal payments. It is the responsibility of the National Health Insurance Fund, which is a state institution under the Ministry of Health. The State Patient Fund has five units called Territorial Health Insurance

Funds; the Kaunas Region is served by the Kaunas Territorial Health Insurance Fund. All health-care services provided by private or public institutions in possession of signed agreements with Territorial Health Insurance Funds are free of charge to patients.

In the Kaunas Region, PHC centres (policlinics, dispensaries and family-doctors' offices) are arranged so that their services are also available to residents living more remotely. In addition, each municipality has ambulance stations, mental-health centres, and nursing hospitals. All these services are provided by both municipality-subordinate and private institutions.

Second-level health-care institutions (hospitals and consulting clinics) operate in the municipalities as well. The largest hospital in Lithuania (approximately 2000 beds) – the Hospital of the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences (Kauno Klinikos) – is found in Kaunas city. It provides third-level health-care services (including highest-level specialization in heart, lung and liver transplantations).

The Kaunas Region does not have a separate budget, or health foundation.



Strengths

The strengths of the Kaunas Region include:

- ✓ its being one of the economically strongest regions in Lithuania (this includes the support of EU structural funds and investments in its development);
- ✓ highly qualified academic staff (the Region has five universities, including the Lithuanian Sports University, the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences and the Aleksandras Stulginskis University, which lead initiatives related to health-promotion programmes and projects, such as Health Promoting Kindergartens, Health Promoting Schools, Health Promoting Universities, Health Promoting Hospitals and Health Services);
- ✓ the presence of active public health bureaus in each municipality in the Region;
- ✓ municipal physicians responsible for the coordination of the health services delivered in each municipality in the Region;
- ✓ the Health Promoting Kaunas Region Working Group, which coordinates the implementation of measures to reach the goals of RHN and the Kaunas Region.



Aspirations

The Kaunas Region aims to:

- ✓ decrease health inequalities;
- ✓ develop good practice in intersectoral collaboration on solving health-related problems;
- ✓ implement the Health 2020 strategy (4) (including the Health in All Policies approach (5)), and the Sustainable Development Goals (6).



Challenges

These are the need to:

- ✓ strengthen leadership competencies for positioning the Kaunas Region as a "healthy region";
- ✓ strengthen the administration and management of the Kaunas Region as the Health Promoting Kaunas Region;
- ✓ enhance understanding of the added value of intersectoral collaboration for solving health-related problems in the Region as a whole and in each municipality.



Potential areas of collaboration

The Kaunas Region is interested in collaborating with other regions on:

- ✓ developing effective methods of intersectoral collaboration at the municipal level;
- ✓ joint research projects on health inequalities;
- ✓ developing good practice in primary health care (PHC) involvement in health promotion and the prevention of noncommunicable diseases;
- ✓ the involvement of nongovernmental organizations and the community in health-promotion activities.



Working groups

The Kaunas Region is interested in participating in working groups on:

- ✓ the all-of-government approach/intersectoral action;
- ✓ women's/ men's health;
- ✓ health systems/PHC.



People active in the Regions for Health Network (RHN)

Political focal point

Vytenis Tomkus

Mayor

Kaišiadorys District Municipality

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Technical focal point

Irena Misevičienė

Professor

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Others

Vytas Kederys

Deputy Mayor

Birštonas Municipality

Eglė Grinevičienė

Physician

Birštonas Municipality

Kaunas, Lithuania

Erlandas Andrejevas

Deputy Mayor
Jonava District Municipality

Ina Osauskienė

Director
Jonava District Municipality Public Health Bureau

Vilija Tamašauskienė

Physician
Kaišiadorys District Municipality

Vidita Jonaitė

Director
Kaišiadoris District Municipality Public Health Bureau

Asta Garmienė

Physician
Kaunas City Municipality

Giedrė Juškaitė

Chief Specialist
Health Protection Department
Kaunas City Municipality

Milda Labašauskaitė

Physician
Kaunas District Municipality

Laurynas Dilys

Director
Kaunas District Municipality Public Health Bureau

Ona Šulcienė

Chair, Health and Social Protection Committee
Kėdainiai District Municipality Council

Ramunė Kabošienė

Physician
Kėdainiai District Municipality

Virginijus Slauta

Physician
Prienai District Municipality

Ilona Lenčiauskienė

Director
Prienai District Municipality Public Health Bureau

Akvilė Juškienė

Physician
Raseiniai District Municipality

Asta Montvydienė

Director
Raseiniai District Municipality Public Health Bureau

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