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
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.

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.
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)

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References


