

## Akershus County, Norway

Autumn, Akershus

### General overview

Akershus County, Norway, borders the capital from the east, west and north and is often referred to as “the green belt of Oslo”. Although its geographic area is relatively small (4918 km<sup>2</sup>), Akershus is one of the largest counties in Norway comprising 600 000 inhabitants (11.5% of the total population). It is divided into four districts and has 22 municipalities. While some areas are densely populated (nine out of ten people live in urban areas), there are large distances between neighbours in rural areas (1).

The overall health level in Akershus County is high, and the average life expectancy is 82 years (2). The population is young and well educated compared to the rest of the country. Children thrive in their schools, and businesses provide adequate possibilities for young people seeking apprenticeships. Unemployment rates are low, and the general level of income is high; however, health inequality is increasing because of social inequities, for instance, in living conditions.

Akershus County has the highest level of net migration within Norway and attracts many people in the age group 30–39 years from both Oslo and abroad. Over the most recent 20 years, as a result of immigration from abroad and migration within

Norway, the County has seen a 35.4% increase in population and a further increase of 200 000 is foreseen by 2040 (2). Young adults attracted to living and working in the capital tend to move to Akershus County when they start a family. They are typically of immigrant background, are in their thirties and have young children. This means that the population of Akershus is becoming more ethnically diverse and multicultural. More than 120 000 people commute daily from Akershus to Oslo and other counties. Housing prices in Akershus have increased by more than 50% since 2010; a record-high number of new houses were constructed in 2017 (1).

Akershus County Council is a democratically elected body with regional responsibilities in areas such as education, transport, dental care and regional development. Using its development funds, the County Council aims to promote public health through all service areas. Norway is currently undergoing a regional reform that may influence the way in which the County will be organized in the future.

The Norwegian health-care system was developed as part of the welfare state after the Second World War to ensure access for all inhabitants to quality

care, independent of their place of residence and socioeconomic status. While the system is financed through taxes stipulating certain payment conditions, all residents are covered by the National Insurance Scheme. Health-care policy is controlled centrally, while responsibility for the provision of health care is decentralized. The Norwegian Government has overall managerial and financial responsibility for the hospital sector. After the latter was restructured in 2002, responsibility for running public hospitals was transferred from the county level to four regional health authorities overseen by the Ministry of Health and Care Services.

The aim of the *Norwegian Public Health Act* passed in 2011 was to contribute to social development that promotes public health and reduces social inequity in health. The Act stipulates that public health work shall promote population health and well-being, as well as good social and environmental conditions, and contribute to the prevention of mental-health

problems and somatic diseases. It aims to facilitate long-term, systematic public health work and lists responsibilities at the local (municipality), regional (county) and national (country) levels. It specifies that the local and regional levels are the key stakeholders, but that it is the responsibility of the national level to support them.

Akershus County Council has the overarching responsibility for promoting good public health in the County. This includes monitoring the status and key determinants of the health of the population and ensuring that health is included in all regional policies. This work is organized through partnerships with the County's municipalities and financed through grants and subsidies. The Council also cooperates with and supports several nongovernmental organizations in various fields. Responsibility for implementing measures to meet public health challenges lies with the municipalities, most of which have a designated public health coordinator.



## Strengths

Akershus County:

- ✓ has a well-funded, well-functioning health-care system;
- ✓ takes a broad, holistic, intersectoral approach rooted in the *Norwegian Public Health Act*;
- ✓ enforces focus on public health in municipal planning through the *Planning and Building Act*;
- ✓ applies the precautionary principle and a participatory approach.



## Aspirations

Akershus County is aiming to:

- ✓ develop sustainability, for example, through health-promoting urban areas;
- ✓ introduce a systematic public health approach;
- ✓ enhance public well-being.

## Challenges

These include:

- ✓ increasing health inequality resulting from social inequities in living conditions;
- ✓ the rise in the rate of mental-health issues;
- ✓ the sectoral focus on public health;
- ✓ a large ageing population.

## Potential areas of collaboration

Akershus County is interested in collaborating with other regions on the development of:

- ✓ health-promoting urban areas;
- ✓ social sustainability;
- ✓ preventive measures and life-coping skills.

## Working groups

Akershus County is interested in participating in working groups on:

- ✓ development goals/equity;
- ✓ participatory approaches/resilience;
- ✓ the all-of-government approach/intersectoral action;
- ✓ health-promoting urban development/sustainable development and well-being.

## People active in RHN

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## References

1. Akershusstatistikk nr 2-2017 – tall og fakta om befolkningen i Akershus [Akershus statistics no. 2-2017 – facts and figures about the population in Akershus]. In: Statistikkhefter og grunnlagsdokumenter [Statistics and foundation documents] [website]. Oslo: Akershus fylkeskommune; 2017 (<http://www.akershus.no/ansvarsomrader/statistikk-og-kart/om-statistikkjenesten/statistikkhefter/>, accessed 5 February 2018).
2. Akershusstatistikk nr 3-2016 – befolkningsprognoser for Akershus 2016–2031 [Akershus statistics no. 3-2016 – population prognoses for Akershus 2016–2031]. In: Statistikkhefter og grunnlagsdokumenter [Statistics and foundation documents] [website]. Oslo: Akershus fylkeskommune; 2016 (<http://www.akershus.no/ansvarsomrader/statistikk-og-kart/om-statistikkjenesten/statistikkhefter/>, accessed 5 February 2018).

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