



Västra Götaland – winter

Västra Götaland, Sweden

General overview

Västra Götaland is one of the three most populated regions in Sweden with 1.7 million inhabitants living in an area of 23 800 km². Situated on the west coast, it comprises forests and agricultural land, a coastline and an archipelago, with small villages, 49 middle-sized municipalities and one large city, Gothenburg. Västra Götaland is home to the largest port in the country and is one of the leading regions in Sweden as far as industry and transportation are concerned. The gross domestic product per capita is SEK 495 000 (€42 168) and life expectancy at birth for males and females, respectively, is 80.7 and 84.2 years (1).

Region Västra Götaland (VGR) (2) is one of Sweden's largest employers; with 55 000 employees and an annual turnover of SEK 60 billion, VGR is responsible for public services in the geographical area. Its governing bodies are the

Regional Council (149 political members) and the Regional Executive Board (15 political members). Elections are held every four years. VGR's main responsibility relates to the running of the health-care sector, including hospitals, primary-care centres, and mental and dental-health services. Sustainable development, research and innovation are also major responsibilities of VGR. The region is home to the renowned Sahlgrenska University Hospital and several science centres. VGR has a national mandate to take the lead in the regional development of several areas, such as business, culture, environment, public transport, public health promotion and human rights.

The Regional Development Strategy (2021–2030) (3) sets out the direction. It presents aims and priorities in areas where the rate of transition needs to accelerate through to 2030. It focuses on

areas that are developing through alliances forged between organizations and sectors, and through

collaboration at the local, regional, national, and international levels.

Regional activities linked to the WHO European Programme of Work

The following activities are linked to the three core priorities of the European Programme of Work (EPW): ((i) moving towards Universal

Health Coverage (UHC); (ii) promoting health and well-being; and (iii) protecting against health emergencies.



Moving towards UHC

The Swedish health-care system is mainly government-funded and decentralized; it is financed primarily through taxes levied by regional councils and municipalities. All three levels of Swedish government are involved in the health-care system. At the national level, the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs is responsible for overall health and health-care policy, working in concert with eight national government agencies and 21 autonomous regional councils, which are the main providers of public health care services. The Ministry, along with other government bodies, supervises activities at the subnational levels, allocates grants, and periodically evaluates services to ensure that they correspond to the national goals. At the local level, 290 municipalities are responsible for care of older people and people with disabilities.

The Swedish Social Insurance Agency (4) provides financial support for anyone living or working in Sweden in the event of illness or disability, as well as for families with children.



Promoting health and well-being

Increases in population are mainly seen in the older age groups for whom the need for care is greatest, which has led to an increase in the need for care. In addition, residents have different and greater expectations of care than can be met today. There is, therefore, a need to realign the health-care system to make better use of the resources available. A strategy for this transition is the action plan entitled, “2020 – Regarding conversion of health and medical care in Region Västra Götaland” (2), which is coordinated with the Regional Development Strategy (3).



Protecting against health emergencies

The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) (5) works towards developing and strengthening the ability of society to manage emergencies and crises, locally, regionally and nationally.

As a regional actor, VGR focuses on both environmental and social sustainability. In VGR, the following three priorities relate to protection against health emergencies:

- the impact of emissions on the climate and their serious threat to biodiversity;
- the widening health gap, including the increase in the socioeconomic divide and housing segregation in connection with which many people feel they are not fully engaged at the community level;
- the local differences in access to work and social services, which are increasing in the region.

Actions linked to the EPW flagship initiatives

(The Mental Health Coalition; Empowerment through digital health; The European Immunization Agenda 2030; Healthy behaviours: incorporating behavioural and cultural insights.)

Initiatives relative to the Mental Health Coalition

Region Västra Götaland Action plan for Suicide Prevention

In order to decrease the number of suicides and suicide attempts, there is a need to integrate long-term action in all regional and local activities. The

VRG action plan on suicide prevention builds on six areas identified by a council, comprising representatives of civic society and the police, as well as public officials, and relates to activities that are under implementation (6).

Initiatives relative to empowerment through digital health

Future health-care information platform

All information concerning public health care services must be accessible to all – citizens, patients and staff. The future health-care platform represents a cooperation between VGR, public and

private care providers and the 49 municipalities. It is an extensive, long-term programme for change, and one of VGR's most comprehensive strategies towards the development of the health-care services.

Initiatives relative to the European Immunization Agenda 2030

Hard to reach communities

During the COVID-19 pandemic, VGR has set up new and innovative vaccination services together with partners in the private sector and nongovernmental organizations. Through mobile

teams, cultural interpreters, dialogues via already established social media platforms, and vaccine services outside medical institutions, it has been possible to reach out to remote communities.

Initiative relative to healthy behaviours: incorporating behavioural and cultural insight

Angered Community Hospital

This hospital serves the community with accessible, quality health care, based on the needs of the residents. Its work is based on the principles of equality, non-discrimination, participation,

inclusion, and accountability. Angered Hospital has a unique public health assignment, which entails promoting health equity among residents, patients and employees (7).

Initiative specific to VGR

Despite efforts that are being made to create a system whereby more students leave school with a satisfactory, complete education, the results to date are inadequate. Different stakeholders, with different areas of responsibility, resources,

and perspectives, need to cooperate to reduce failures in young students. The initiative entitled “Completed studies” is a long-term, cross-sector, public health investment in working towards this end (8).

The three most important topics for collaboration within the Regions for Health Network

These are:

1. protection against health emergencies
2. WHO RHN as an evidence base for information
3. health through digitalization.

Main partners and collaborators

These include:

- 49 municipalities
- civic organizations
- the private sector
- universities
- the Country Administrative Board.

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1 All URLs accessed 19 May 2022.