



GEZOND IN ...

STIMULERINGSPROGRAMMA GIDS
LOKALE AANPAK GEZONDHEIDSACHTERSTANDEN

Healthy in...

Stimulation Programme

Local approach to reducing health inequalities

Health inequalities: breaking the trend

Good health: not for all

Health inequalities explained

Good health is a great asset, both for individual citizens and for society as a whole. The Dutch are achieving a higher life expectancy and enjoy increasingly more years in good health. However, this good health is not evenly distributed over the population. On average, people with lower levels of income and education have a seven-year shorter life span. Their healthy life expectancy is as much as 19 years lower, compared to people with higher levels of education. These differences are called health inequalities.

Health inequalities can stretch beyond a lower quality of life and an increased use of health care. It is a process that amplifies itself, and causes and effects are intertwined. Poor health has an inhibiting effect on education, work and other forms of participation in society. In turn, lack of participation in society can lead to reduced health. For people who are socio-economically vulnerable, as those living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, poor health turns out to be the most critical obstacle to finding work, besides a burden of debt. Addressing health inequalities means working with other sectors, such as education, employment, housing and the greater social domain.

Also, poor health literacy is tightly related to health inequalities. Overall, people with low socio-economic status tend to have limited health literacy, namely they have difficulty finding, understanding and using health related information. If people do not understand their GP's advice or the instruction leaflets for medication, they are directly exposed to health risks.

Which factors influence health?

There are several factors impacting people's health. Individual factors like genetical disposition and lifestyle are of great influence. But environmental factors and the circumstances people live, work and grow up in, also play an important role. These include:

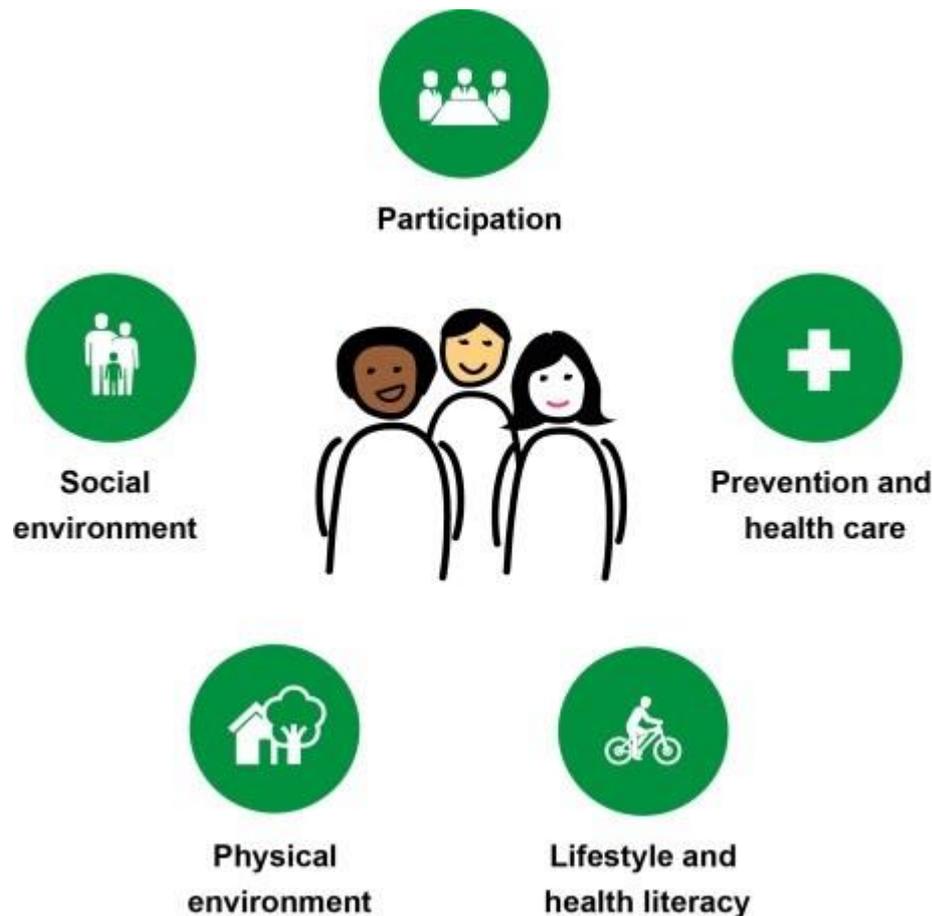
- social network
- facilities and attractiveness of one's neighbourhood

- ability to participate in society through work, education or other ways
- working conditions
- quality of housing
- access to prevention and care facilities
- quality of education

How do we break the trend of increasing health inequalities?

If we don't take action, health inequalities will continue to increase, causing a variety of problems for individual people and for society. Therefore, a sustainable approach is urgently needed. As many different factors impact the health of people with lower income and education, various sectors and elements must be part of this approach. (International) experience has shown that a process oriented approach at neighbourhood or community level, with an active role for citizens themselves, is key. An approach like this consists of five action points, dealt with collectively: participation; good and accessible prevention and health care; healthy social environment; healthy physical environment; lifestyle and health literacy.

Five action points to better health



- **Participation:** Participating actively in society (through paid or volunteer work, education, or otherwise) enhances health, and healthy people can participate more. Therefore, municipalities often link the policy domain Work and Income (poverty policy), Social Support, Public Health, Education and Sports.
- **Prevention and health care:** Proper prevention and health care are conditions for health. Access to care is a main concern for people with lower education and migrants. It is essential to invest in effective communication by professionals. Collaboration between public health, prevention, care and social services, as well as between municipalities and health insurance companies is needed.
- **Social environment:** A social network influences behaviour, a sense of safety and security, and health. In a healthy social environment people feel safe and supported, and the community's social cohesion is strong. Municipalities can work to improve quality of life; safety; prevention of isolation and domestic violence; volunteer work and support of family caregivers.
- **Physical environment:** The physical environment can enhance and hinder health. Living in disadvantaged areas increases the risk of health problems, e.g. by its location close to a highway, aging housing or experienced unsafety. An attractive living environment, on the other hand, can invite people to cycle, walk or exercise, for instance.
- **Lifestyle and health literacy:** It goes without saying that a healthy lifestyle impacts health positively. Targeted interventions encouraging people to adopt a healthy lifestyle are helpful, especially when part of a broader, integrated approach. In order to live healthy and maintain good health, (health) literacy is vital. These are skills to understand and use health information, and include finding one's way in the health care system and voicing complaints. When introducing lifestyle interventions, health literacy needs to be addressed.

Would you like to learn more about these action points? Please visit www.gezondin.nu. Here, you will find information sheets on: Participation, Prevention & health care, Lifestyle & health literacy and Physical environment.

Eight pillars: conditions for success

Local political involvement

Differentiation is essential

Synergy circuits

Social marketing at all levels

Monitoring progress and results

Public and private partnerships

Citizens are in the lead

Process oriented approach

In a local approach based on the five areas, eight pillars are important conditions for success. One example of such a pillar is a process oriented approach: firstly, gain insight into the problem, then set goals and execute them. It pays to invest in dialogue with all parties involved: representatives of various policy domains, local professionals and the citizens who are at the centre of it all.

Other success factors are: enabling citizens taking the lead and creating local political support. Collaboration between public and private parties, such as schools, sports clubs, companies and shopkeepers can also be beneficial. A successful approach is always tailor-made; there is no such things as 'the community', 'the citizen' or 'the municipality'.

Would you like to learn more about the eight success factors? Please visit www.gezondin.nu and consult the various information sheets, such as Citizens are in the lead, and Process oriented approach.

Facts & Figures

- The difference in life expectancy between people with higher and lower levels of education, is on average 7 years
- The difference in years of experienced good health between higher and lower educated people, is on average 19 years
- limited health literacy occurs in about 25% of the population, especially in people with lower education, migrants and the elderly
- in the Netherlands 1 in 9 people between 16 and 65 has limited literacy

About Healthy in...

Healthy in... advises municipalities on strengthening their local, integral approach to health inequalities. The programme invites those in government, professionals and organisations from various sectors to become actively involved. It organises national and regional meetings, creates practical tools and established an interactive online platform which connects all initiatives and parties concerned.

Healthy in... is executed by Pharos, Dutch centre of expertise on Health Inequalities and Platform31, knowledge and network organization cities and regions, as part of the National Programme Prevention, financed by the Ministry of Health, Sports and Welfare.

Quotes by politicians involved in the programme:



Martin van Rijn, Secretary State of the Ministry of Health, Sports and Welfare

“We are facing an enormous challenge that we, as State and municipalities, can manage together. The foundations are there. Now we need to expand our partnerships and make them structural.”



Victor Everhardt, alderman Utrecht

“Socio-economic health inequalities have to be dealt with. We can only do this by building on the power of citizens and by supporting municipalities in their local approach. This programme succeeds in finding the right tone of voice.”



Rinda den Besten, ambassador of the programme Healthy in...

“The programme Healthy in... is not a blueprint from The Hague, our political capital, but a tailor-made approach. It is up to the municipalities to get involved, the ball is in the aldermen’s court. That is exactly what I, as former alderwoman, like so much in this programme.”