

Summary

This report examines the state and perspectives of the promotion of health enhancing physical activity in Switzerland. Starting from a discussion of basic concepts and frameworks for the promotion of physical activity, the current situation in Switzerland is being analysed. The final section of the report comprises a number of recommendations regarding the further development of the promotion of physical activity.

Health enhancing physical activity

Regular physical activity contributes to our well-being and to the prevention of various diseases. The current Swiss recommendations for health enhancing physical activities suggest at least one hour per day of moderate physical activities, i.e. activities that increase one's breathing and heart rate slightly, for children and at least half an hour per day for adults. In 2013, Switzerland will most probably adopt the current WHO recommendations that state that adults should engage in moderate physical activities for at least 150 minutes per week or intensive activities lasting at least 75 minutes per week. Even though current evidence for Switzerland is not conclusive, the data suggest that about half of the Swiss population does not meet these recommendations.

A multisectoral approach

Physical activities are possible in various situations and settings. Several international organisations call for a multisectoral approach in physical activity promotion. This approach should integrate different policy areas, geographical levels (national, regional, local) and actors from the public as well as private sectors in order to plan and carry out programmes and projects aimed at different domains and target groups in a cooperative fashion. Even though the health, education, sport, transport, work and urban and spatial planning sectors are of particular importance in such a multisectoral framework, an encompassing approach should also take into account the environment, housing, media, research, politics and legislation sectors.

The health sector plays a double role in the multisectoral approach. On the one hand, it can develop its own programmes (e.g. physical activity in rehabilitation, physical activity guidance by general practitioners). On the other hand, it has a more vital interest in the health effects of physical activity than other sectors. As a result, the health sector has a duty to create awareness for health enhancing physical activity in other sectors and to furnish these sectors with know-how concerning the promotion of physical activity.

Current situation in Switzerland

The new "Federal Law on the Promotion of Sport and Physical Activity" (FLS) features a clear commitment to cooperative physical activity promotion under the leadership of the Federal Office for Sport (OFSPO). This commitment is reflected in a large number of measures that range from national programmes to very specific interventions at the local level. Whereas the health sector is mainly involved in supporting and coordinative tasks, practical interventions are most often carried out by the sport and education sectors. In addition, there are several promising projects and programmes in the leisure, transport, planning and environment sectors. However, encompassing multisectoral strategies and co-ordinations are still lacking or are at least not well known in the public.

Perspectives and general recommendations

To further strengthen health enhancing physical activities in Switzerland, current measures need to be kept up and, in some instances, be extended and complemented. The following six areas for further work can be identified:

- 1) **Review of responsibilities:** Even though the FSL places the main responsibility for the promotion of physical activity with the OFSPO, the latter needs to be supported by other organisations and sectors. Against this background, responsibilities and the potential for mutual support in a cooperative framework need to be reviewed and clarified between different actors.
- 2) **Multisectoral co-ordination and networks:** On the basis of this review multisectoral alliances need to be built with a view to an efficient planning, coordination and implementation of programmes aimed at the promotion of physical activity. There are already two important coordination bodies – namely the National Programme on Diet and Physical Activity (NPDPA) and the Swiss HEPA-network – that can be used and should be strengthened and developed further. In federalist Switzerland, a particular further challenge refers to the integration of local and regional (cantonal) actors and programmes into this cooperative framework.
- 3) **Setting of priorities:** There is already a large number of projects carried out by the education and sport sectors and aimed at (school) children and young persons. These projects need to be continued and, in some instances, concentrated. In addition, existing programmes in the transport, planning and environmental sectors should be developed further. Finally, there is substantial potential for improvement and development with respect to physical activity promotion for small children and adults (including the elderly) as well as in the areas of physical activity at work and at home.
- 4) **Documentation of projects and quality management:** The coordinative efforts mentioned under 2) may also serve the purpose of concentrating and documenting existing measures (e.g. by publishing examples of best practice). For documentation purposes the OFSPO's existing data bank "Children on the move" could be improved and expanded.
- 5) **Data:** The data base for analysing the extent of physical activity in Switzerland and identifying target groups should be developed further. Big surveys such as the Swiss Health Survey (Federal Statistical Office) or Sport Switzerland (OFSPO) need to be supplemented with accelerator studies, qualitative research and evaluation results.
- 6) **Information and communication:** Finally, ways to improve information on the objectives and measures of physical activity promotion need to be explored.

Recommendations on behalf of the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH)

The FOPH can make important contributions to all work areas mentioned above. In particular, the following spheres for action need to be mentioned:

- **Role of the FOPH in the promotion of physical activity and coordinative function:** The FOPH plays an important role in efforts at multisectoral coordination because it has its own coordination body (namely, the NPDPA) and because, as the central actor of the health sector, it is particularly well-placed to act as the "health conscience" of physical activity promotion.
- **Commitment of the FOPH:** As the NPDPA is currently scheduled to end in 2016, the FOPH needs to think about its long-term involvement in the promotion of physical activity. One option for the future might be the consolidation and reorganisation of the Swiss HEPA-network as a general coordination mechanism and centre of excellence in physical activity promotion.

- **Collection of know-how and information:** With its Monitoring System Diet and Physical Activity (MOSEB) and the commission and publication of research studies the FOPH already plays a key role in the documentation of and information on the promotion of physical activity. As far as possible, this role should be developed further.
- **Proper projects and support of third-party projects:** In the framework of the NPDAP, the FOPH currently carries out its own projects (e.g. actionsanté) and supports third-party projects. Whether project support can be kept up or even be broadened in the future is largely dependent upon the importance the FOPH will assign to health enhancing physical activity in its future general strategy.