

# Foreword

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In recent years the study of indicators of health and health promotion has become a major field of activity both of the Department of Social and Preventive Medicine at the University of Berne and of the Research Unit in Health and Behavioural Change at the University of Edinburgh. Both institutes committed themselves to this work in response to the needs for health information expressed by government agencies in Switzerland and Scotland, as well as in connection with the strategy for health for all of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Health Promotion Programme of the WHO Regional Office for Europe.

As part of this effort a number of meetings and workshops were held. In connection with the International Conference on Health Behaviour Research held in February 1986, a group of social scientists and epidemiologists from Europe and North America met in Edinburgh to take a first look at this field and to prepare an international workshop. In June 1986, the Workshop on Measuring Health Behaviour and Health: towards New Health Promotion Indicators was held in Berne.<sup>1</sup> A report on its results was presented at the International Conference on Health Promotion in November 1986 in Ottawa; at this Conference the editors of this issue also held a workshop addressing the question of indicators and the measurement of health. In January 1987 a working meeting held in Edinburgh evaluated the regional lifestyle indicators included in *Targets for health for all* ((1985) Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe) and suggested revisions and additions. At the International Conference on an Intercantonal Health Indicators Study in Switzer-

land held in August 1987 in Lausanne, particular attention was paid to the health information needs of policy-makers. In October 1987 at a first international meeting on health promotion research held in Edinburgh, theoretical and methodological issues of indicator development were discussed.

This issue of *Health promotion* addresses the key problems and questions in the field of health and health promotion indicators that have been dealt with during the last two years. The papers coming out of the Berne Workshop make up a major part of this issue and summarize the results of the Workshop. Taking a critical look at the state of the art in the field, problems in the development of health promotion indicators are described and discussed. Based on this critical account, a strategy for future work is outlined and illustrated. We hope that, based on this work, an approach will emerge to integrate health promotion research and policy development and to provide both the public and government agencies with meaningful and reliable information on health promotion.

## BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

Because the Workshop addressed a new field, much needed to be learned about the state of the art of measuring conditions and dimensions of health. For this reason 17 papers were presented at the Workshop covering measurement issues in several areas: health status and subjective health, health behaviour and health-related actions, health-related social processes and health resources, the specific health problems of age groups and occupational groups, the methodo-

logical problems encountered in surveys and intervention studies, and strategic questions related to the development and use of health promotion indicators.

Four working groups were formed to review the state of the art and suggest further steps for the development of health promotion indicators in one of the following areas: health status and dimensions of health, health behaviour and health resources, and important issues cutting across these areas.

This special issue includes 12 articles coming out of the Workshop.<sup>2</sup> The authors were asked to rewrite the papers they presented, taking their experiences of the Workshop presentations and discussions as well as the more recent literature into account. The articles by Noack, Dean and Mootz deal with conceptual, strategic and methodological issues in the development of health promotion indicators. Serving as a background paper for the workshop, Horst Noack's contribution outlines the policy context and a general theoretical and methodological framework for indicator development. Considering the lessons learned from the social indicators movements in the 1960s and early 1970s, Marijke Mootz discusses both strengths and critical issues in current approaches to health indicator development. Kathryn Dean discusses some of the fundamental differences between the concepts of health and health promotion and shows the specific conceptual and methodological problems encountered in the measurement of health promotion.

Three articles address the measurement of health status. Drawing from substantial experience with the Nottingham Health Profile, Sonja Hunt outlines and illustrates conceptual, methodological, technical and practical issues encountered in the development of subjective indicators of positive health. Robert Kaplan's article, on the other hand, describes and illustrates an alternative approach that has been thoroughly tested by a group of research workers in the United States, combining morbidity and mortality data into composite measures of health. In his article on disability and mortality of the working population in the Netherlands, Johann Groothoff shows how these two measures change over time and how this affects their meaning.

Four articles cover conceptual and methodological problems related to the development and validation of indicators of health promotion processes. Snehendu Kar, Wendy Colman, Jeanne

Bertolli and Emil Berkanovic describe the methods and some of the results of a cross-cultural project, using a modified Delphi technique, which was designed to identify a set of indicators of individual and societal actions directed towards physical, mental and social health. In their article, Heiner Bucher and Felix Gutzwiller present a composite indicator of preventive health behaviours as well as evidence that seems to support the validity of this measure. Irving Rootman's article describes the steps undertaken to design, develop and use a national system of health promotion indicators in Canada.

Three articles illustrate the current state of the art in the field of health and health promotion indicators. Thomas Spuhler's article summarizes the Workshop discussion both in the plenary sessions and the working groups. Michel Thuriaux describes the present status of health for all indicators in the European Region of the World Health Organization, with particular emphasis on health promotion and lifestyle targets. Richard Müller's essay takes a critical look both at the concept of health promotion and the demand for health promotion indicators. He poses a question: will these indicators help to improve social policy or to increase social control?

In their two articles, the editors attempt to summarize the Berne Workshop as well as subsequent work, meetings and discussions. One suggests practical steps towards the development of suitable indicators within a comprehensive programme of health promotion policy and health research. The other addresses the current status and the theoretical and methodological issues and problems in the specification and use of health promotion indicators.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was made possible through the joint sponsorship and support of a number of organizations, making it a truly international endeavour. We thank the Department of Health of the Canton of Berne and both the Minister, Dr Kurt Meyer, and the First Secretary, Dr Heinz Locher; the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health and its Director, Professor Beat Roos; the WHO Regional Office for Europe and, in particular, Dr Owe Petersson, who as Acting Director, Programme Management attended the Berne Workshop and Dr Ilona Kickbusch,

Regional Officer for Health Promotion; the National Institute on Aging of the National Institutes of Health, US Department of Health and Human Services; the Scottish Health Education Group and the Scottish Home and Health Department.

Special thanks go to the participants at the meetings, to the authors of the articles, to the people who helped us organize the meetings (particularly our colleagues from the two institutes and Professor T. Abelin, Director of the Department of Social and Preventive Medicine in Berne), and to those who typed and helped us

edit the manuscripts, Marlies Wepf and Ursula Neuenschwander in Berne and Beatrice Robertson and Emmanuelle Tulle-Winton in Edinburgh.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Berne Workshop was sponsored by the Department of Health of the Canton of Berne, the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health, the WHO Regional Office for Europe and the National Institute on Aging, National Institutes of Health, US Department of Health and Human Services.

<sup>2</sup> Four other papers were not included and one will be published in the next issue of *Health promotion*.

