
Health in Switzerland – the 2008 national health report

Gesundheit in der Schweiz – Nationaler Gesundheitsbericht 2008

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La santé en Suisse – Rapport national sur la santé 2008

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In health care discussions of recent years it has often been assumed that many of the new chronic diseases are in the first instance triggered by individual behaviour. This led to the idea that whoever eats poorly or is physically inactive will become ill and finally to the conclusion that people only have themselves to blame. Research is now showing more and more conclusively, that an individual's health is also determined by external influences. These include socio-economic factors such as education, profession and income, as well as socio-cultural determinants such as gender, ethnic origin, or social status. How healthy a society is depends therefore on individual as well as social conditions.

Identifying relationships and multi-sector solutions

The report "Health in Switzerland" describes for the first time the health of the population in the light of social health determinants. Switzerland, following Sweden and Finland, is one of the first countries in Europe to take up this new concept. With this move comes the conviction that a health policy has to provide more than a mere guarantee to care for sick people. A health policy should also contribute to shaping social conditions, so that as many people as possible have access to the health-system resources. In doing so it will also be valuable in reducing health disparities.

Such an attempt requires a health report such as this one not to simply collect data in order to show the health condition of a society, but also to show how health and illness are dis-

tributed within the socio-economic groups; men and women separately and viewed over a lifespan from childhood to old age. The report "Health in Switzerland" attempts to do this by taking into account the influence of determinants such as status, education, social resources, as well as the family and social environment. It refers to the relationships which should make it possible for all persons in the public-health service to develop future improvements for the health system. Such an approach shows that the objective of healthy life goes beyond health policy in the narrowest sense, but is a multi-sector task involving the accountability of many societal decision makers.

Contents of the health report

The present report „Health in Switzerland – National Health Report 2008“ describes in five main chapters the future topics of the Swiss health and society policy:

- Chapter I introduces the concept of health determinants
- Chapter II treats the health of the population at different stages of life and under difficult living conditions
- Chapter III provides a summary of chronic illnesses and accidents
- Chapter IV discusses the basic health determinants “education” and “environment”
- Chapter V provides information on the utilisation, cost and financing of the health care system
- The conclusion describes ways to achieve a multi-sector health policy

Each of these main chapters is divided into several sub-chapters according to subject area. A summary of the main points is provided for each sub-chapter. In conclusion the report presents a scientific summary underlining the importance of the strategy “Health in all areas of society and politics”. The national health report wishes to create a bridge between science and politics and contribute to current discussions on health policy.

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