

The challenges of large-scale prevention and health promotion programs

Thomas Kohlmann

Intervention programs in prevention and health promotion differ in terms of their scale and scope. They range from nationwide to regional or even local programs, from programs targeting the general population to initiatives for people with specific needs or risks. Depending on their scale and scope, these programs face different challenges. For large-scale programs operating on the national level big amounts of time and financial resources are required. These programs are often difficult to implement and to organize, considerable efforts are necessary for monitoring their success.

In this issue of IJPH, Hercberg, Chat-Yung and Chauillac [1] describe the general framework and implementation of the French National Nutrition and Health Program. This is a comprehensive large-scale intervention which includes, for example, information strategies for the general population, specific population groups and health care professionals. The article clearly describes the tremendous efforts and complementary strategies that are required for the implementation of such an ambitious program. Results from a national evaluation study will show if and to what extent the program has achieved its goals.

An economic evaluation of another program working on the national level, the prevention bonus program of a large sickness fund in Germany, is presented in the paper by Stock et al.

[2]. As this is one of a small number of studies investigating directly the effects of new legal provisions in the social law in Germany, the study results are of special importance – for both health policy and public health. From a health policy perspective the result that implementation of the bonus program saved money might be the most important news. From the public health point of view the key message of the study is that prevention programs embedded within the statutory health insurance system do work and are – at least in short term – even cost-effective. While the empirical evidence provided by the study by Stock et al. is promising, this study can not hide the fact that little is actually known about the consequences of the numerous previous changes in the Social Code governing the statutory health insurance in Germany. More studies of this kind are needed to inform policy makers and to change the health system from a predominantly opinion-based system to a system of evidence-based health care.

IJPH will be eager to present further evidence about the effectiveness of large-scale prevention and health promotion programs. The more is known about how these programs work the more justified is the enormous investment involved in their implementation.

Thomas Kohlmann
Co-Editor in Chief

References

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