

Public health in Hungary – current status and future plans

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The population of Hungary in proportion to its present territory was at its historical peak in the 80s with a number of 10.7 million people and has declined to approx. 10 million. A drop below 10 million is expected by this year. Until 1980 the birth rates have outnumbered death rates in Hungary. The trend has changed and since the 1980's the number of births has been decreasing. The reason is: Hungarian women are elder when they have their first baby compared to European trends.

According to the present fertility rates a Hungarian woman statistically gives birth to 1.3 babies in her life. The low number of births prognosticated the unfavourable changes in our demography and in longer term it may lead to the significant ageing and decreasing of the population in addition to socio-economical problems based on the disadvantageous composition of age groups. It means Hungarians are decreasing in number and have an aging society.

Death rates have shown a declining tendency since 2000. In 2007 the average life expectancy for men was 67.52 years and 75.34 years for women. Early death is strikingly high especially in case of chronic non-communicable diseases, as cardiovascular diseases cause 50.6% while malignant tumours cause 24.6% of the total death rate. The cardiovascular diseases mean a significant individual and social burden affecting negatively not only the sustainable development but the chances of international competitiveness of the Hungarian economy. Furthermore they have a profound negative impact on both the working capacity and the quality of human resources including their multiplying economical effect on the family, the community and the whole society.

The high prevalence of cardiovascular and malignant diseases in Hungary can be traced back to the complex system of genetic, environmental, social, cultural and lifestyle factors. The national and international experiences obtained in the last decades underlined the high prevalence of these diseases are directly influenced by the so-called risk factors originated from the above listed factors/elements. These risk factors can be improved by health promotion. The Hungarian population has a high number of risk factors with unfavourable temporal tendencies compared to the European situation.

Surveying the state of health of the population is essential to make decisions concerning health issues but it is also important in the decision on investments, developments and financial supports affecting indirectly health, such as transportation, agriculture and taxing.