



Gold medal for Finnish health in all policies book



Health in All Policies: Seizing opportunities, implementing policies

Kimmo Leppo, Eeva Ollila, Sebastián Peña, Matthias Wismar, Sarah Cook

Ministry of Social Affairs and Health of Finland, 2013

350 pp, paperback

ISBN: 978-952-00-3406-1

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This article is a review of the book “*Health in All Policies: Seizing opportunities, implementing policies*” edited by Kimmo Leppo, Eeva Ollila, Sebastián Peña, Matthias Wismar, and Sarah Cook. This book (printed and online publication) was published by the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland in 2013 (1). The book is freely available at http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/188809/Health-in-All-Policies-final.pdf. The main features, structure, and highlighted contents of the book are briefly sketched out in this review.

The book promotes understanding of a Health in All Policies (HiAP) approach, the history, and the scientific evidence of effectiveness available to apply the HiAP concept in order to overcome challenges faced by policy-makers. HiAP is a relatively novel approach which arises from the traditional idea that health is not only medicine (2). The book offers lessons to policy-makers and managers on how to apply the HiAP approach. It further highlights the health sector's role in developing healthy public policies. In addition, the book provides examples of structures to foster collaboration, coherence, and participation among stakeholders from different government portfolios and responsibilities. The book further provides invaluable insights for politicians, researchers, and civil society advocates.

The striking feature of the book is its emphasis on the HiAP in the context of the dynamic and non-linear nature of the policy-making process and the importance of seizing windows of opportunity that may arise from changing economic, social, and political realities. It emphasizes a global perspective on

improving health and health equity by adding a HiAP lens for decision-making and implementation. As such, readers will find case studies from across the globe demonstrating how a HiAP approach works in different settings. Opportunities for action may be seized effectively only when backed up by a long-term vision and health strategies arising from the knowledge of public health and the policy context.

The book publication was a Finnish contribution to the 8th Global Conference on Health Promotion (8GCHP) held in Helsinki in June 2013 and sets the gold standard for sharing a new way of thinking about developing health creating practices. Health is a broad concept which has been defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) since 1946 as “a state of complete physical, mental, spiritual, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition” (3). This shows that population health is affected by diverse determinants not only inside the health sector, but also outside what is commonly thought of as health sector responsibilities. Therefore, adopting a HiAP approach should allow the public to have a say in the policies and decisions which may arise from government ministries of non-health sectors and international systems. The evidence suggests that public policies in all sectors affect the determinants of health and are a major vehicle for actions to reduce social and economic inequities and inefficiencies (4). This book introduces HiAP as an approach and an innovative strategy to public policies across sectors that systematically takes into account the health and health systems implications of decisions. HiAP tries to find synergies, and keep away from adverse health impacts in order to improve population health and health equity. HiAP incorporates a concern with health consequences into the policy development process of all non-health sectors and institutions and this allows government to address the main determinants of health in a more systematic manner (4). It also takes into account the benefit of improved population health for the goals of other sectors. The cornerstone of a HiAP approach is health-related rights and affairs. It emphasizes the consequences of public policies on health determinants, and aims to improve the accountability and responsibility of policy-makers for health impacts at all levels of policy-making: international, national, regional and local.

The book is well-structured in three parts and fifteen chapters. Part 1 is organized around five key areas: 1) introducing the HiAP and analytical framework of the book grounded on the Kingdon's triple streams and window of opportunity framework in order to analyze the dynamics of policy-making; 2) background of HiAP; 3) links between health and sustainable development, challenges and solutions to HiAP in low-income

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Citation: Lewis R, Yazdi Feyzabadi V. Gold medal for Finnish health in all policies book. *Int J Health Policy Manag* 2014; 2: 103–104. doi: 10.15171/ijhpm.2014.25

Received: 7 February 2014, Accepted: 22 February 2014, ePublished: 25 February 2014

countries; 4) the Social Determinants of Health (SDH) and required efforts to tackle the SDH and closing the gap for health equity; and 5) the importance of global and national policy space for health improvement.

Part 2 highlights policy examples using a non-linear policy-making framework, with a focus on how to reach policy decisions and how to implement them. This section is divided into eight chapters which assess progress in different policy areas including Early Childhood Development (ECD), work and health, mental health promotion, agriculture, food and nutrition, tobacco, alcohol, environment, and development assistance. For each topic, the book also exhibits some case studies from across the world.

Finally, Part 3 starts with the role of health sector in HiAP, and ways for the health sector to take the lead. The book ends with offering a series of lessons for policy-makers, politicians, researchers, and civil society advocates who must all work together to implement sustainable health policy with a shared goal of improving population health.

Overall, the book follows a set of pivotal questions that guide the analysis throughout the book. The most important questions include:

- How do health concerns get lifted on to the political agenda?
- How are health problems and solutions identified and prioritized for HiAP?
- What motivates or prompts politicians, policy-makers, and bureaucrats from other sectors to take into account the consequences of their policies for health or to alter policies in manners that are favorable to health?
- What are the main determinants for successful inter-sectoral policy-making?
- What is the role of the health sector in this process? What are the determinants of successful implementation of a given policy?
- Which capacities and competences are required by the health sector to advocate, negotiate and implement HiAP?

In summary, this book shares useful and practical experiences about application of HiAP as an innovative strategy in a wide range of regions with diverse levels of economic development. It demonstrates that HiAP can not be fulfilled unless all stakeholders at different levels and parts of policy-making collaborate together. The book identifies practical opportunities and challenges for raising health on political agendas and stresses the importance of seizing opportunities for negotiating and implementing feasible policy solutions in light of competing priorities. It has a very ambitious scope to provide policy-makers with a perspective on the problem, policies and politics, as well as giving some practical insights on the implementation process. Overall, this volume helps improve our understanding of the dynamics of HiAP at the levels of policy-making and policy implementation.

The following conclusions could be drawn from this book. First, tangible examples of practical experiences applying the HiAP at different contexts make this book more applicable and interesting for a wide range of readers. Second, it considers dynamics of policy as a notable feature in institutionalizing the HiAP concept from agenda setting to implementation. Third, it highlights the importance of politics and national and international policy spaces to tackle the impacts of public policies on population health and the efforts to make stakeholders more supportive to considering the health consequences of their decisions. Fourth, it articulates that incorporating health considerations into policies across all sectors is challenging and, even when decisions are made, implementation may be only partial or unsustainable. Last but not least, although the target audience of the book is national level policy-makers, it is also invaluable for those interested in bridging evidence and policy-making at all levels and across all topics. The main emphasis is on issues related to health promotion and social determinants of health although HiAP is a broader concept that encompasses all levels of policy-making and health systems functioning. HiAP has a challengeable and a long path ahead as it is expected that in the future the process of 'Health in All Policies' would extend to develop. Therefore, this book will require continued enrichments as ongoing research will inevitably offer more advances in the world of healthy public policy.

Acknowledgements

The authors of this book review express their sincere gratitude to Sebastián Peña, one of the book authors, for his valuable comments.

Ethical issues

Not applicable.

Competing interests

Authors declare that they have no competing interest.

Authors' contributions

Both authors contributed equally to the drafting and revising the manuscript.

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