

Research for Public Health

Strategy for the National Institute of Public Health, University of Southern Denmark
2024-28

Introduction

We live in a time of significant public health challenges: a demographic shift where an increasing number of people live with multiple diseases simultaneously, rising social health inequalities, and a growing prevalence of mental health issues among children and young people. These health challenges are linked to broader issues such as labor shortages and resource constraints in the public sector, particularly in healthcare.

We already know a lot about the most significant risk factors and the overall patterns in the population's health and morbidity. We also know quite a bit about the types of interventions that have the potential to make a positive difference. However, we know too little about how to create change in practice, and research often lags behind: screens and social media are changing our lives, while digitalization is impacting the welfare society's services. Commercial actors are developing new products and marketing strategies. Climate change brings new disease patterns and simultaneously creates momentum for political initiatives that can have a health impact.

With the institute's new strategy, we aim to set a direction where we contribute to setting new agendas in the field of public health. The goal is to create knowledge that increases our understanding of today's complex challenges while making a societal impact and contributing to change. Therefore, we call the strategy "Research for Public Health."

Who we are

As a national public health institute, we conduct research to improve public health in Denmark and Greenland. At the same time, we contribute internationally to the development of knowledge, theories, and methods in the field of public health science. We are a university institute that conducts research independently of political and economic interests. The institute's expertise is particularly within epidemiology and population health monitoring, public health humanities and social sciences, and intervention and implementation research.

What do we want?

Over the next five years, the following strategic ambitions will guide our work:

- We are internationally recognized for our contributions to research on how public health can be improved for the entire population and how we can reduce health inequalities.
- Our work qualifies decisions about public health at all levels: from local to national and international.
- We strengthen research on the social, commercial, environmental and climate-related determinants that shape public health and create health inequalities.

What do we mean by social, commercial, environmental and climate-related determinants?

Social determinants:

These refer to the fundamental conditions under which people live and the systems that create these conditions, including economic, political, organizational, relational, and cultural factors.

Commercial determinants:

These are products and practices aimed at generating profit for private actors that affect public health. This can include alcohol, digital media, diet, and tobacco and nicotine products. It also covers practices such as marketing and lobbying that influence the political agenda.

Environmental and climate-related determinants:

These refer to conditions in the surroundings, such as clean air, a stable climate, cities, and built environments that affect public health.

The above is based on WHO's definitions and delimitations. During the coming strategy period, we will continuously assess which specific aspects within the three areas we will prioritize.

What are our goals?

We will achieve the above ambitions by pursuing the following eight objectives:

1. Strengthen the scientific foundation of our work
2. Advise authorities and decision-makers based on timely and relevant data
3. Engage in partnerships to improve public health in collaboration with others
4. Educate bachelor, master, and PhD students to handle future health challenges
5. Provide continuing education for professionals based on research-based knowledge
6. Make our knowledge relevant and accessible to key stakeholders
7. Strengthen our international collaboration and recruitment
8. Continue to be a good and attractive workplace for all employees

Below, we describe more concretely what we aim to achieve within each of these objectives and how this relates to our overall ambitions.



ACTION

How will we achieve our goals?

1. Strengthen the scientific foundation of our work

Our research must be of the highest international quality, thereby strengthening the scientific basis for promoting public health. We will continuously develop the content, theoretical, and methodological focus of our research to reflect public health issues in the population. We will particularly strengthen methodological and theoretical development to explore and describe factors that affect health inequalities and increase our understanding of the social, environmental, and commercial determinants that shape public health.

In the coming years, we will particularly:

- *Strengthen our core scientific competencies in epidemiology and population health monitoring, public health humanities and social sciences, and intervention and implementation research.*
- *Develop interdisciplinary collaboration between the institute's various scientific approaches to public health issues.*
- *Support research initiatives with innovative methodological and theoretical potential.*
- *Secure funding for research that allows for methodological and theoretical development.*
- *Ensure publication of contributions to methodological and theoretical development.*
- *Create the best possible conditions for conducting high-quality research, including developing and supporting young research talents.*

2. Advise authorities and decision-makers based on timely and relevant data

Providing research-based advice and guidance is one of our most important tasks and societal contributions as a national public health institute. Our ambition is to deliver relevant, timely, and independent advice at a high professional level, contributing to qualifying societal initiatives and decisions. It is crucial that we maintain methodological independence and freedom to publish and that our advice contributes to prioritizing and acting on the social, environmental, and commercial drivers that significantly impact public health and health inequalities.

In the coming years, we will particularly:

- *Qualify priorities and decisions in the field of public health by providing high-level professional advice on the most important issues for the health of Danes.*
- *Collect relevant and timely data that can uncover health throughout the life course and support data-driven public health work at the municipal, regional, and national levels.*
- *Develop and improve existing methods for data collection/surveys to ensure that the collected data is relevant and reliable.*
- *Increase the scientific impact of advisory tasks through the publication of articles in international journals.*

3. Engage in partnerships to improve public health in collaboration with others

There are areas where we achieve more together than individually. Therefore, we engage in partnerships to improve public health and reduce health inequalities. Partnerships include various forms of collaboration and organization around a common vision with varying commitments, roles, purposes, and degrees of formalization. The partnerships must be meaningful for all actors, we must see the research and knowledge potential, and regardless of the form of collaboration, it is crucial that we maintain our scientific independence and institutional integrity.

In the coming years, we will particularly:

- *Establish strategic collaborations to create change in relation to social, environmental, and commercial determinants.*
- *Increase competencies and capacity to engage in partnerships around crucial public health challenges across sectors.*
- *Work systematically to implement health-promoting interventions and structural measures through partnerships that create new knowledge.*
- *Ensure a framework for ongoing and systematic assessment and consideration of our collaboration and funding forms.*

4. Educate bachelor, master, and PhD students to handle future health challenges

Educating future bachelors, masters, and PhDs is an important source of change in society. Our ambition is to contribute to academic and research-based education that equips students to undertake work that can strengthen public health and contribute to reducing health inequalities through both research and practice.

In the coming years, we will particularly:

- *Increase interest in and enrollment of students in the BA program in public health science at SDU and support the development of the study environment in Odense.*
- *Further develop the master's program in public health science in Odense and further highlight the specialization in Implementation and Evaluation.*
- *Continue to develop PhD courses to educate future researchers.*
- *Increase our professional contribution to other programs at SDU.*
- *Ensure and promote teaching quality and development.*

5. Provide continuing education for professionals based on research-based knowledge

Our ambition is to offer research-based continuing education in innovative formats that are highly relevant and applicable to our goal of improving public health and reducing health inequalities. Therefore, we develop and adapt the courses in close dialogue with the potential recipients, and we build on our scientific core competencies in dialogue with the professionals we teach.

In the coming years, we will particularly:

- *Test and establish continuing education that can enhance practice within selected themes and provide practical perspectives on our research.*
- *Establish a sustainable structure and business model for continuing education within a university and research environment.*

6. Make our knowledge relevant and accessible to key stakeholders

SIF's communication should contribute to making our research relevant to society and accessible to decision-makers, health professionals, media, and professional environments. We will bring solid and research-based knowledge into play so that it can contribute to qualifying decisions that impact public health and health inequalities.

In the coming years, we will particularly:

- *Develop our strategic communication so that our knowledge increasingly reaches decision-makers.*
- *Strengthen our expert readiness and communication skills so that we can respond quickly and effectively to important agendas and debates.*
- *Increase the visibility of researchers' academic production and research collaborations.*

7. Strengthen our international collaboration and recruitment

Social, environmental, and commercial determinants often have a global character, and therefore SIF must have an increased focus on participating as a partner in international collaborations and networks. At the same time, internationalization enhances the quality of SIF's research, and it is increasingly necessary to secure funding from large national funds.

In the coming years, we will particularly:

- *Attract foreign researchers to the institute as guest researchers and/or employees.*
- *Attract funding for international collaborative projects, primarily through EU and Nordic research funds.*
- *Increase publication with international collaborators.*
- *Support/strengthen opportunities for international stays for the institute's researchers at both junior and senior levels and increase participation in international research networks.*
- *Establish an institute environment and ensure researcher support that facilitates participation in international research projects and supports the recruitment of non-Danish speaking staff, including the provision of oral and written information in English.*

8. Continue to be a good and attractive workplace for all employees

We aim to provide good conditions for work and employment at the institute. As an employee at the institute, you contribute to promoting public health and reducing health inequalities, and it is our ambition that everyone feels part of a strong and meaningful community around this purpose. It is crucial for us to retain, develop, and recruit talents, create an excellent research environment, and support relevant career development for all, regardless of employment type.

In the coming years, we will particularly:

- *Maintain a good working environment with a high level of well-being among all employees.*
- *Promote attractive employment conditions, both in terms of job content and duration.*
- *Support and create transparency around development opportunities and career paths for all employees.*
- *Ensure targeted support that contributes to the quality of both funding and research activities.*
- *Promote and support diversity and inclusion at the institute, both professionally and in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, and employees with disabilities.*
- *Ensure opportunities for professional exchange, collaboration, and sparring across the institute and research groups.*