

The use of health promotion initiatives by municipalities in Belgium

A retrospective observational study

N. Verhaeghe¹, T. Barbe¹, L. Annemans^{1 2}

¹ Department of Public Health, Ghent University, Belgium; ² Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium

E-mail: Nick.Verhaeghe@UGent.be

OBJECTIVES

Lifestyle interventions can reduce the incidence of several diseases and as a consequence lead to a decrease of health care expenses.

The aim of this study was to evaluate if municipalities in Belgium are using intervention strategies for optimizing the health behavior of citizens. Special attention was given to what extent certain high-risk groups were reached.

METHODS

The study consisted of a retrospective observational design. An e-mail was sent to the general services or – if existing – the sport services of 570 Belgian cities (308 in the Flanders region; 262 in the Walloon region) for seeking their interest in participation.

The data were collected using an online questionnaire with closed-ended questions

RESULTS

- The response rate in the Flemish region and Walloon region was respectively 57.47% and 16.41%
- In Flanders, 94.9% and in Wallonia 65.1% of the respondents reported that they organize at least one type of health promotion initiatives
- In both regions, municipalities consider it as important to focus on health promotion. However, between both regions differences exist in the types of health promotion initiatives that are organized (Figure 1 & 2)

Figure 1: Most common organized initiatives in the Flemish region (in %)

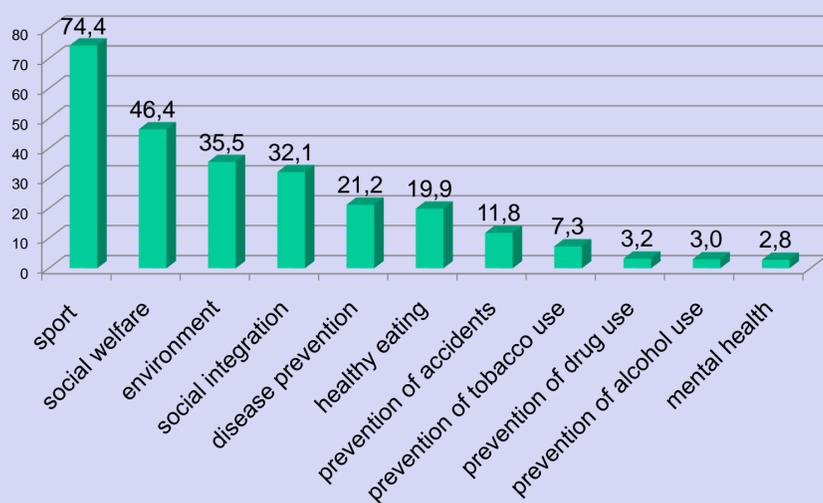
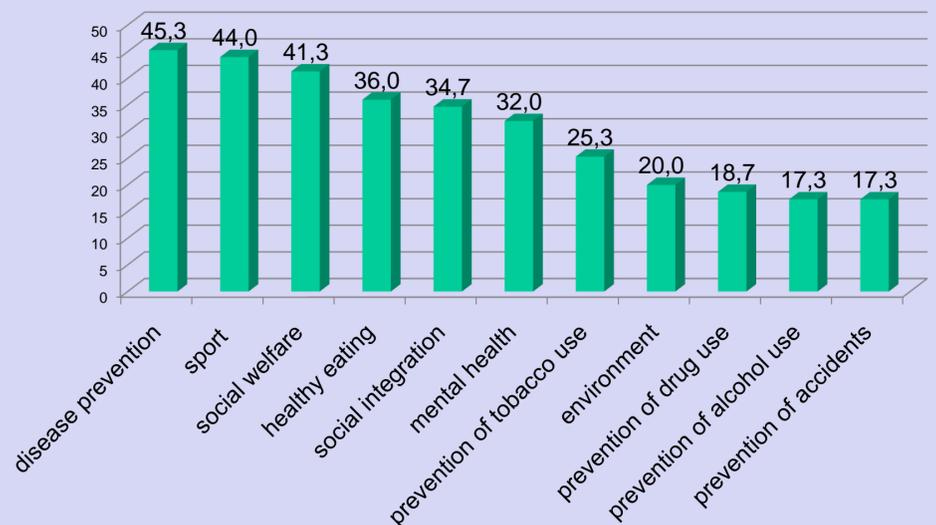


Figure 2: Most common organized initiatives in the Walloon region (in %)



- The initiatives aimed at certain high-risk groups like persons with mental health problems, older and disabled persons were scarce.
- On the level of municipal policy, a lack of appropriate financing was identified as the most common reason for not organizing preventive strategies

CONCLUSION

- On the level of the municipal policy, reinforcement of the value of preventive strategies concerning health promotion with appropriate financing is required.
- When organizing preventive initiatives, special attention to reach certain high-risk groups will be needed