

“Public Health Policies – Training Romanian staff at Regional level to develop Public Health Policies (PHPRO)”

## Report on Public Health Policy development at local level (Barcelona)

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Interviews with:

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The Public Health Agency of Barcelona (ASPB) can be considered a typical institution in regard to public health policies at local level. Its mission is to safeguard the health of the citizens of Barcelona and its visitors by monitoring the health status of the population and its determining factors, developing policies for maintaining and improving the health status of the population, providing public health services and being the sanitary authority in the city. It provides also technical and professional support to Catalan Government in the field of public health. To fulfil its mission the Public Health Agency of Barcelona has several departments in charge with corresponding activities:

- environment surveillance,
- public health observatory,
- science and research,
- laboratories,
- food safety and hygiene,
- occupational and community health,
- preventive health programs and prevention of addictions.

The management of ASPB is based on the following values:

- transparency and participation.
- actions based on evidence and assessment.
- response capacity.
- efficiency in use of resources.
- reflection on practice through applied research.
- professional qualifications and growth of ASPB personnel.
- interactions and cooperation with other institutions and organizations.
- the pursuit of equity, social cohesion, inclusion and cohabitation.
- the contribution to a sustainable environment and society.

The vision of ASPB is to be a benchmark organization in the field of management and innovation in public health. It aspires to excellence in its services and fosters good practice in public health, through evaluation and pursuit of total quality.

Within the Public Health Observatory, the Evaluation and Intervention Methods Service (EIMS) has three main tasks: developing interventions (smoking cessation), providing evidence based recommendations, evaluating programs.

Public Health Policies (PHP) are of two types: regulation type (laws, bylaws, regulation, norms) and program type (various programs, interventions, activities). As an example the

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Public Health Agency of Barcelona and the Department of Health of Catalonia jointly elaborated the Public Health Law for Catalonia. On the other hand ASPB developed various programs targeted at public health issues (mental health, addiction control, healthy diet, pest control) Although developed within the EIMS these programs are implemented by other units within the agency (community health unit) These programs are correlated especially with environmental health, occupational health, health promotion and prevention, healthcare delivery but also with other public policies related to food industry and traffic police.

The ASPB publishes yearly a report with public health data comprising the following realms: health system information, epidemiological surveillance, environment surveillance, food and food providers surveillance, urban fauna / pest control, public health laboratory, health promotion, community health, health coordination.

ASPB issues an annual report of the health status of the population of Barcelona and its main public health issues, and in some cases proposes interventions. The City Council - which has a health commission comprising representatives of all parties - decides about the developing of new health policies. This health focused political group in the City Council is the main stakeholder within this endeavor.

The annual public health report issued by ASPB comprises the following: a demographic report, social and economic status of the population, living conditions, mobility on working days, air quality, water, health and safety of food, urban animals and pests, health related behaviors, use of addictive drugs and substances (including addiction treatment), the use of healthcare services, primary healthcare, emergency and hospital care, social health and welfare, mental healthcare, pharmaceutical services, action on public health, perceived health, health of homeless people, sexual and reproductive health, TB, HIV-AIDS infection, traffic injuries, occupational injuries, mortality. This report is based on statistical data and analysis and it is the main information source upon which the decision to develop a health policy is taken. Usually it takes few years to develop and implement a new public health policy.

The PHPs are developed within the ASPB. There might be 15 people working for the development of a PHP, either within the Agency’s formal structure (for the ASPB own public health interventions and programs) or in think tanks for developing various public health policies at national, regional, local level (mainly regulation). For certain projects, the ASPB may ask the contribution of academics and students. People working in developing PHPs are experts in their fields, mainly in public health.

Aside from human resources the main resource used is the information system. The instruments used for developing PHPs are the evidence and data analysis, indicators, public health data, statistics. Based on these, comes the next step, planning. Sometimes pilot programs are developed in order to test interventions. The data used to justify actions/decisions is the data collected in the health system and demographic data; the ASPB carries out a household survey every 4 years. People who work in the development of PHPs are mainly PH specialists; Depending on the skills required the teams might comprise also biologists, psychologists, environmental specialists; everybody has at least minimal training in public health. The leadership of the task teams is always assured by a public health specialist.

In case of public health programs (actions/interventions) the approval comes from the governing board of the ASPB. In some cases, when many public institutions are involved the approval is given by the City Council of Barcelona.

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The public health policies (programs) developed by ASPB are implemented by PHA of Barcelona together with the regular health services and other public services (local authorities, schools, primary care providers, NGOs, specialized firms), depending on the program. The PHA of Barcelona controls the implementation of the public health policy. It is applied by the ASPB and other public services (the public health system, schools, health care providers, occupational health doctors). The resources required for PHP implementation are provided by ASPB, the health system and other public or private entities depending on the program. The implementation might take one or more years.

The PHP is implemented according to a plan. This plan is discussed with stakeholders, it is observed and its implementation monitored

The PHA of Barcelona monitors the public health policies. Monitoring is carried out by a department in the Agency (the Evaluation and Intervention Methods Service) with participation of other departments, as required. People Working in monitoring public health policies are usually public health specialists.

The indicators used for monitoring the PHP are based on usual health and social data. In some cases (usually related to behaviours), the data from surveys is used. Monitoring lasts more than one year.

The evaluation of the PHP is done by the PH Agency of Barcelona, by a department in the Agency, the Evaluation and Intervention Methods Service.

Comparative studies (control groups) are main instrument for evaluation used by the Evaluation and Intervention Methods Service. The data used is statistical data, health and social indicators and sometimes data from surveys. The evaluation of PHP is formally included in design and in the plan. Usually it might take 3 to 4 years. The conclusions of the evaluation are published in the annual health report issued by ASPB

The key factors of success are considered to be: evidence based policies, a reliable information system, comprehensive data, good planning, setting realistic objectives, human resources, training in public health and health economics. It is considered important that plans should rely on existing resources and on a good assessment of priorities, because resources are always scarce.

The strengths of the process are considered the reliable data base, human resources, relationship with stakeholders, political agreement,

The weaknesses of these processes are the diminishing number of public health specialists and the relationship with PHCs.

A pitfall that should be avoided is ideology driven decisions.

A good reference source to better understand the process is the Barcelona Annual Health Report and the website [www.aspb.cat](http://www.aspb.cat) of the Public Health Agency of Barcelona.