Ensuring a society for all ages:
Promoting quality of life and active ageing
UNECE 2012 Ministerial Conference, Vienna, Austria

Project Title: „Health has no age“ – pilot project for development of residential care homes into health promoting settings in Vienna, Austria

Description of the Project

“Health has no age“ investigates the potential of comprehensive health promotion in residential care using a settings approach, which has become a central feature of efforts to promote health recognizing the significance of context.

The project addresses positive health (functional health and wellbeing) among residents, relatives and staff from three organisations with approximately 1000 inhabitants and 300 staff members from Kuratorium Wiener Pensionisten-Wohnhäuser, a public provider for residential long term care in Vienna, Austria. The example was set up by Ludwig Boltzmann Institut Health Promotion Research and its practice partners, Austrian Health Promotion Foundation, Vienna Health Promotion and the Austrian Board of Social Insurance Agencies.

A needs assessment took place to explore stakeholders’ perceptions of stresses and strains as well as resources for health and social support. Interventions focused on development of organisational structures and processes into a health promoting direction. A specific action on user mobility was addressed as an intervention study. The effects for health outcomes are observed for overall development of the setting (development of health promotion in residential LTC) and single interventions (e.g. strategy development and mobility intervention) as part of the evaluation.

Why is it considered a good practice

The promotion of health of elderly people living in residential care organisations is important because they are in a particularly vulnerable position. The settings approach is relevant because of the organization’s impact on the overall health outcome of its population in making healthy or unhealthy decisions. The main benefit of the project is to generate knowledge about feasibility and effectiveness of using a health promoting settings approach to integrate health promotion into residential long term care. For policy and practice the project should demonstrate the potential of putting health promotion on the agenda for residential LTC.

Lessons learnt

The project is well anchored within the participating organisations. The fact that the practice partner is currently in a stage of reorganisation can be seen as an opportunity for change but also competes for attention and resources.

A limitation of this project is the narrow time frame. As strategy development is an open process. Because of that the project will not be able to measure health outcomes at the end of the pilot period (except the predefined mobility intervention). The restriction to work only with one provider as practice partner facilitates project work but limits the generalizability of findings.

Relevance for the UNECE region

Residential LTC for the elderly is a rather new setting for health promotion within the European region. The project addresses commitment areas concerning the quality of life and maintenance of independent living in institutional environment and the promotion of healthy life styles, including programmes of intervention for more healthy years. Increasing health orientation of residential homes is expected to have a major influence on health of residents but also on well-being among staff and relatives.

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