Nordic Welfare Centre

GOOD AND EQUAL HEALTH IN THE NORDICS

CONFERENCE REPORT



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INTRODUCTION and three fundamental questions



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Public health is a major theme of the Swedish presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2024. Today, good and equal health for all is much more than solely a question of mitigating the impact of significant traditional risk factors such as smoking or alcohol use. Health also involves meaningful and active leisure, screen time and digital media use, as well as addressing loneliness and social isolation.

These questions were raised at the digital conference in May 2024 on good and equal health in the Nordics. In his opening remarks, Jakob Forssmed, Minister for Social Affairs and Public Health in Sweden, highlighted the need to ensure good and equal health outcomes for all members of society, starting with our children and youth.

– All children and adolescents should have access to active and meaningful leisure time in community with others through, for example, sports, arts, or music. This is important here and now and it lays the foundation for good health later in life.

Jakob Forssmed drew attention to the challenges of health promotion and stressed the importance of cooperation, particularly focusing on children most in need. In this process, social and economic conditions, access to community resources, and social relationships all play a significant role.

– I'm deeply concerned about the increased use and time we spend – children and young people in particular – on screens and digital media. The screen seems to enter every corner of our lives and seems to push other things aside, such as taking part in physical activities, doing homework, or sleeping, which are very important aspects for health. And we know too little about how this is affecting us.

The Swedish Minister also underscored the importance of combatting loneliness and social isolation. He described loneliness as a complex cross-sectoral issue that demands cooperation and broad efforts across multiple policy areas.

– Loneliness and social isolation have such a negative impact on our physical and mental health, not to mention the human suffering they cause.

After highlighting these **three health hazards of our time**, Jakob Forssmed posed three questions framing the conference theme:

1. How do we get all children involved in leisure and community activities – including those who, for various reasons, think it is impossible or a big step to join a club or an association?
2. How can we create a constructive dialogue about how society can support children and young people to build a healthy relationship with digital media?
3. What role can society play in combatting loneliness and social isolation?

This conference report aims to answer these questions based on the presentations given at the digital conference 'Good and equal health in the Nordics', broadcast live from Stockholm on May 7, 2024. The questions emphasise how the conference framed the broad concept of health not merely as the absence of disease, but rather conceived as a state of physical, mental, and social well-being.

BACKGROUND: New challenges require new solutions



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While the Nordic countries may be known for their high quality of life, significant challenges persist in ensuring universal opportunities for Nordic residents to flourish, irrespective of background or circumstance. We recognise the need for evidence-based tailored solutions to involve everyone who is affected.

KARIN TEGMARK WISELL, Director General, Public Health Agency of Sweden: The relevance of meaningful leisure time and social connections for good and equal health

– Meaningful leisure time is important for health and should be seen as a source for health improvement.

Karin Tegmark Wisell stressed that the three main topics of the conference, as outlined in Minister Jakob Forssmed's three questions, call for similar measures to some extent and also share some of the solutions.

– We must listen to those who are affected, and different sectors need to work together at all levels of society.

Karin Tegmark Wisell pointed out that meaningful leisure time could have a positive impact on mental health through the establishment of social relationships. These can reduce stress and strengthen identity, creativity, connection, harmony, and empowerment.

At the same time, a third of 9–12-year-olds and half of 13–18-year-olds in Sweden report spending too much time on their smartphones. It is equally common among the youth to feel that digital media is addictive and prevents them from completing tasks they should be doing.

– Too much screen time can affect important aspects of health such as sleeping habits, physical activity, and social interactions. Loneliness can lead to poor mental health, and poor mental health can also lead to increased loneliness.

According to Karin Tegmark Wisell, loneliness is not only a tragedy for the individual but can also have a negative impact on entire communities and societies.

– Studies show that social isolation and loneliness may lead to an increased risk of early death. Not only are social isolation and loneliness linked to anxiety, depression, suicide, and dementia, but loneliness can also increase the risk of cardiovascular disease and stroke. It is most common among the oldest and youngest age groups in Sweden. One in four Swedish girls aged 15 experiences loneliness 'often' or 'always'.

KATRINE BACH HABERSATT, Lead, Behavioural and Cultural Insights, WHO Regional Office for Europe: Behavioural and cultural insights for equitable health

– The connection between behaviours and health is inextricable. What we eat and drink, whether we vaccinate, attend cancer screenings, engage in physical activity, and interact socially has a bearing on health.

Katrine Bach Habersatt emphasises that behaviours have traditionally been categorised as an individual issue. However, health-related behaviours are tied to socioeconomic factors. It can be challenging to prioritise health when faced with other hardships such as lower income, stigmatisation, and exclusion.

– The solution is not to offer the same services and information to everyone. Instead, society should provide the right support to all so that everybody achieves the same health outcomes.

When these policies are formed, says Katrine Bach Habersatt, it is vital to gain insights by engaging and including different population groups. These insights should be used to develop evidence-informed policies, services, and communication. Traditional information campaigning is not enough. The focus should be on health behaviours, improving health and well-being, and reducing inequity.

– Individual factors such as knowledge and motivation are just one side of the coin. To truly understand and address behaviours, we need to study both the sociocultural and the structural context. Interventions should be co-designed by those who are affected.

In order to enable, support, promote, and sometimes restrict certain behaviours in order to achieve better health within a population group, Katrine Bach Habersatt proposes a number of considerations.

– Tailoring the solutions to those who are affected, engagement of those who are affected, learning from individuals who do well despite all odds, using policy to alter social norms, thinking outside the box, and investing in evaluation to ensure we only do good and no harm.

THEME 1: Meaningful and active leisure for children and youth



Photo: Niclas Jessen

The first theme of the conference focused on meaningful and active leisure for children and youth. In ensuring this, the feeling of belonging is important. In the Nordic countries, leisure activities are often run by voluntary leisure and sport organisations in the civil society sector. This taps into the power of communities but may also exclude some people due to participation costs.

In Sweden, a government project is working on creating a model with a prepaid leisure card to ensure every child has fair access to enjoyable leisure activities. Currently, children from low-income families don't have the same opportunities to participate.

– We need to work towards equality in health, and the leisure card can be one piece in the puzzle of reducing loneliness and strengthening physical activity and social interaction. We need to provide all children aged 8–16 with meaningful leisure time, says Madeleine Larsson, Senior Analyst and Project Manager at the Swedish Public Health Agency.

Similar models have already been developed in Finland, Denmark, and Iceland. Representatives from each of these countries gave a presentation before a joint panel conversation.

IINA BERDEN, Special Government Advisor at the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland: The Finnish model for leisure activities as a tool to improve the well-being of children and youth in Finland

The reformed Finnish model for leisure activities was presented in 2021 after years of development to improve the well-being of children in primary and secondary school. The model combines existing best practices with cooperation between schools and organisations that provide leisure activities.

– In comparison to previous after-school activities and in a radical change from former practice, the children were asked two questions in a biennial pupil survey distributed to every schoolchild: What activities would you like to try, and what would you definitely like to do?

Iina Berden says that children have suggested a wide range of over 80 different activities.

– It came as a surprise to us that children were interested in so many things! We initially believed they would be mostly interested in sports rather than culture and science, but we were completely mistaken.

Iina Berden highlights that the key to the success of the Finnish model was to tailor leisure activities according to the children's suggestions in cooperation with organisations providing leisure activities. Another main idea of the Finnish model is to target every child, not only those who don't have hobbies, in order not to single out anybody.

– Crucially, the quality of after-school activities should be as high as in the hobbies taken up in the evening.

When evaluating the model, the children mentioned that genuine interaction with the teacher was the most important factor in making the leisure activity meaningful.

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It came as a surprise to us that children were interested in so many things! We initially believed children would be mostly interested in sports rather than culture and science, but we were completely mistaken.

– Iina Berden, Special Government Advisor at the Ministry of Education and Culture in Finland.

MICHAEL LIND OLSEN, Specialist, Culture, Library and Sports section, Roskilde Municipality, Denmark: A strive for equal possibilities for socially disadvantaged children – an introduction to social partnerships and leisure card in Roskilde Municipality

Roskilde Municipality has a leisure card scheme in order to create equal opportunities for disadvantaged children and young people. The model connects disadvantaged families with sports associations, providing a leisure card to cover participation fees for up to three seasons, and supporting the organisations in keeping the children participating actively.

– In Roskilde we have learned that the leisure card makes a difference for a lot of families and children. In many cases the leisure card is all a family needs in order for the children to start playing sports.

Michael Lind Olsen suggests that certain families require additional assistance, which is facilitated through collaborative efforts with sports organisations, called social partnerships.

– We have partnered with seven different sports organisations in Roskilde to support their work with disadvantaged children.

The municipality offers financial aid to these organisations, enabling them to hire a dedicated staff member who focuses on maintaining children's participation.

– When we, as a municipality, support the sports associations in their work with disadvantaged children, the positive output is far greater than the money we put in.

MARGRÉT LILJA GUÐMUNDSDÓTTIR, Chief Knowledge Officer at Planet Youth: Engaging young people in organised leisure activities – perspectives from Iceland

The Icelandic prevention model is well known for its data-driven and all-encompassing approach to health promotion among young people. The model, which also includes a leisure card, focuses on four domains: family, peer group, school, and leisure time.

– We have seen that sports and other leisure activities can have a preventive impact on substance use among young people. We focus on high-quality activities, and our key aim is to avoid having so-called non-doers, people without involvement in an activity. It takes a village to raise a child. We are not putting the responsibility on the individual child. More than anything else, it is community work.

Margrét Lilja Guðmundsdóttir also underlines the significance of supportive adults in a child's life. While the Icelandic prevention model has historically targeted alcohol, nicotine, and other substance use reduction, it now extends its methodology to address issues such as excessive screen time, energy drink consumption, and sleep deprivation.

– I'm thrilled to see how we are implementing upstream prevention. The effort put in now is going to pay off later on.

Panel conversation on the Nordic models to ensure a meaningful and active leisure for children and youth

After listening to the presentations from Finland, Denmark, and Iceland, Madeleine Larsson, of the Swedish Public Health Agency tasked with developing a leisure card model for Sweden, initiated the panel conversation that followed.

– I enjoyed learning how Finland engages school children directly. The equal opportunity work in Denmark was interesting to hear about. And, of course, Iceland, with the emphasis on local communities and upstream prevention. It's impressive that the Icelandic model includes so many arenas, not just leisure time activities.

The panel conversation focused on keeping the leisure activity programmes running effectively, both keeping the participants active and ensuring enough funding. The panel agreed that if the models work smoothly, the projects will pay for themselves later on thanks to their preventive effects.

Iina Berden from the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture pointed out that while much of the emphasis typically lies on smaller children, more resources could be allocated to teenagers.

– It is not uncommon for children aged 12–15 to stop participating in leisure activities. We usually explain it away by pointing out that teenagers are just not that interested. But I don't agree. I think it has more to do with how the organisations respond to young people's needs. Teenagers usually need much more interaction.

The same phenomenon has also been observed in Iceland, where Margrét Lilja Guðmundsdóttir from Planet Youth emphasise the importance of keeping everyone involved. According to her, the answer is the education of both coaches and parents.

– To educate people in the leisure domain is really important. We have also chosen to put extra effort into educating parents and caregivers, particularly those from immigrant backgrounds, on the importance of their child participating in leisure activities.

Community and upstream prevention came up repeatedly in the conversation. In order to keep politicians and municipalities interested in funding the project, it is vital to share success stories, as was recognised by Michael Lind Olsen from Roskilde in Denmark.

– Around 5 % of school students in Denmark experience school refusal. I recall a situation involving a girl who was struggling with attendance and heading down the wrong path. However, her father enrolled her in a club, where her team coach became her mentor. Within a year, she transitioned from staying at home to becoming an active part of the team and returning to school. She even took on a leadership role in recruiting new members.

THEME 2: Screen time and digital media use among children and youth



Photo: iStock

Screen time and digital media were the second theme of the conference. The challenge is to find a balance between the risks and benefits of digital media consumption. National guidelines for screen time for young people have been established or are being drawn up in many Nordic countries.

The Nordic ministers for health and social affairs have agreed that more work should be done at the Nordic level to address how screen time affects the health and well-being of children and young people.

The conference highlighted the work currently being done in this field in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, before delving deeper in a panel conversation.

JENS KRISTOFFERSEN, Senior Advisor at the Prevention and Inequality Unit at the Danish Health Authority: Recommendations on screen use – The Danish model

– We commenced this work in 2019, focusing on the increasing use of screens and social media among children and young adults. Our efforts have two objectives: firstly, to generate knowledge to inform recommendations, and secondly, to disseminate this knowledge through reports and campaigns.

Jens Kristoffersen says that healthy digital use is still a very new subject and that the Danish Health Authority has focused on five factors that increased screen time might affect. These are sleep, physical activity, relationships and friendships, stress, and neurological effects.

The current Danish recommendations, established in 2023, are divided between general guidelines for the whole population and additional recommendations for parents with children living at home.

– Everyone in Denmark, both children and adults, is advised to avoid using screens before bedtime, to keep phones or tablets out of the bedroom, spend time away from screens and remain physically active, and be mindful of their social media use and how screen time affects their well-being.

In additional recommendations, parents are reminded that children under the age of two should not use a screen without active interaction with an adult. Limit screen use when you are with your child. Take an interest in your child's digital life. Make agreements about screen use in the family, which apply to both children and adults.

OLOV BELANDER, Senior Advisor at the Norwegian Directorate of Health: Recommendations on screen use – The Norwegian model

Norway leads in social media usage per day among children and youth in the Nordic countries: approximately 50 % of 9-year-olds and nearly 100 % of 13-year-olds use social media.

– It's important to find the balance. We live in a digital world and need to be digital, but too much screen time might lead to problems with sleep and concentration. Screen use and children is a very complex matter. Age, what they are watching, how active the child is when not on screen, and how well they do in school and with friends are all factors that play a role, Olov Belander says.

The Norwegian government has appointed a committee, Skjermbrukutvalget, which is currently working on evaluating the effects of screen use on children's health. The committee is expected to complete their work by the end of 2024. The current Norwegian recommendations on screen use for children and young adults are based on the WHO guidelines, with some adjustments.

No screen time is recommended for children under 1 year old; no TV, computer games, tablets, or mobile phones are recommended for children aged 1–2. For children aged 2–5, screen time should be limited to one hour a day, with less

being better. Children and adolescents from 6 years up should limit the amount of time spent being sedentary, particularly passive screen time during leisure time.

Olov Belander says that some schools in Norway are taking steps to reintroduce physical books and limit screen use following a public debate. He also emphasises that more work needs to be done to help children become more physically active in the future. Belander also highlights the need for a discussion about the role of the industry behind the increased screen time, from software to hardware developers, in the same way that the sugar industry has been debated.

– Sometimes I wonder if we are conducting a live experiment with our children today, given how much they are exposed to screens. It's a challenging and complex field with more research being conducted all the time. I think it's good that we collaborate on a Nordic level as well.



Sometimes I wonder if we are conducting a live experiment with our children today, given how much they are exposed to screens.

– Olov Belander, Senior Advisor at the Norwegian Directorate of Health

SARA FRITZELL AND HELENA FRIELINGSDORF, Senior Analysts at the Public Health Agency in Sweden: Is there a need for recommendations for healthy digital media use among children in Sweden?

A commission is working in Sweden on recommendations for healthy digital media use among children. The aim is to present the recommendations for ages 0–18 in September 2024, and subsequently develop guidelines for their implementation. The knowledge is gathered both through dialogue with experts and reference groups, and through a literature review.

– We also have a collaboration with Norway and Denmark, which we are very pleased with. This will be ongoing throughout the entire commission, Sara Fritzell says.

Sara Fritzell and Helena Frielingsdorf presented the results from one of their focus groups, which consisted of children. The positive aspects the children associated with digital media include its benefits for learning and entertainment, easy access to information, and the ability to socialise with friends and people from around the world, providing a sense of connectedness and support. Negative aspects involve the ease of becoming stuck and sedentary, exposure to threats and hate, encountering unrealistic ideals that diminish self-worth, and impacts on sleep.

Sara Fritzell says many children want to talk with their parents about their screen time. While some parents may opt to confiscate their children's phones, this isn't always the most effective solution as it removes a significant aspect of the children's lives.

– When we asked parents about the support and recommendations they seek, the responses showed a desire to learn more about the hazards and where to seek support especially if they felt their children were becoming addicted. The parents also emphasised that recommendations must be based on facts and clearly explain the consequences of problematic media use.

In developing the future guidelines, the Swedish commission has conducted extensive literature reviews, focusing primarily on how digital media affects physical and mental health.

– Sleep is an area where we have found robust results. Extensive screen time is associated with sleep problems, affecting both duration and quality. Sleep is, of course, very important for mental and physical health, school achievement, and well-being in general. We have also observed that digital media is associated with an increased risk of a negative body image and increased risks for eating disorders, Helena Frielingsdorf says.

Frielingsdorf points out that digital media also has positive effects, and highlights the necessity for recommendations to find the optimal balance.

– The challenge is to find ways to maintain the beneficial aspects while minimising the harmful effects.

ANDREAS SALOMONSSON, member of the presidium of the Nordic Youth Council: Screen time recommendations and the impact of digital media use from a youth perspective

– I use screens a lot for my studies, social contacts, and my hobby, which is gaming. For me, it's more about what I do when I'm not using a screen. I make sure to bicycle every day or take a longer route to the convenience store. This is how I try to compensate, because I know I can't reduce my screen time.

Andreas Salomonsson acknowledges the challenges, especially the difficulty some young people face in taking a break from screens, as social media algorithms are designed to keep users on the platform. Salomon is also aware that not all screen time is bad.

– More emphasis should be placed on the diverse ways screens are used, as not all are harmful. Some people who are socially isolated in the real world might find their entire social community online. Screens are used for learning and reading, and many people employ screens for much more than just doomscrolling and social media. I think this aspect is partly overlooked.

Salomonsson recognises the need for regulations on screen time but warns against what he calls a kind of binary thinking by the authorities. He maintains that recommendations should come with explanations.

– Many young people don't like being told what to do. It's important to include an explanation in the recommendations so that people can understand why they need to reduce their screen time.

Panel conversation on the Nordic models for screen-time and digital media use among children and youth

To conclude the second theme of the conference – screen time and digital media – some of the experts gathered for a panel conversation. Their main focus was to deal with Minister Jakob Forssmed's question on how society can create a constructive dialogue to support children and young people in developing a healthy relationship with digital media.

– We need to ensure that children and young people have the best options for consuming social media in a healthier way. This includes regulating the tech giants on how they can make social media addictive, as well as on what content is shown, Andreas Salomonsson from the Nordic Youth Council says.

Olov Belander at the Norwegian Directorate of Health agrees.

– I think a dialogue with the tech industry is important, as well as a dialogue across government sectors. And a dialogue with the children themselves!

More coordination between different authorities is also something Jens Kristoffersen at the Danish Health Authority advocates. He stresses that many actors' interests converge, and we need to find a way to cater to them all. One group that has not received enough support is parents, but the question is how to reach them, and young people, effectively.

– It's not easy. Campaigns will not change behaviour, but they are a way of keeping the debate alive. We need to create a better structure around young people so they are not as exposed as they are today. This could include age restrictions, as a lot of content is not appropriate for all ages. It could also involve reducing screen time at school and during leisure time, and hopefully, parents can help by limiting access at certain times of the day, Kristoffersen says.

The need for broad cooperation is also endorsed by Olov Belander at the Norwegian Directorate of Health. He suggests implementing guidelines similar to traffic rules, which everyone follows.

– Maybe we need to implement something comparable to traffic rules, such as digital parenting rules.

Andreas Salomonsson from the Nordic Youth Council agrees that age restrictions should not be the only measure of reducing harm caused by social media.

– A 16-year-old might be consuming social media in a healthier way than a 55-year-old. We can't focus on blocking social media altogether for certain ages, but we should concentrate on identifying and reducing its negative aspects.

Screen time comes with a social gradient, and research indicates that parents with higher levels of education are better at managing their children's screen time.

– From a public health perspective, the best approach is to reduce socioeconomic disparities, thereby addressing health disparities in general. The second-best approach is to provide compensation and increase access to guidelines on healthy screen use. Reaching those that need it the most is our priority, says Helena Frielingsdorf at the Public Health Agency in Sweden.

Frielingsdorf stresses that responsibility lies at various levels within society.

– If we aim to lead in digitalisation, as the Nordic countries do, we must also take the lead in understanding when digitalisation benefits public health and when it does not.

THEME 3: Prevention of loneliness and social isolation



Photo: iStock

The third theme of the conference focused on loneliness and social isolation. The aim is to explore preventive measures to cultivate stronger social connections and nurture a sense of belonging within our communities.

HILLEVI BUSCH, Senior Analyst at the Public Health Agency of Sweden: Mapping the challenges and developing a strategy to reduce loneliness and social isolation

Sweden is developing a national strategy to reduce loneliness. A situation analysis was published in March 2024, and a national strategy will be released in 2025 based on the findings from this analysis.

– Loneliness comes in three different forms: social loneliness, which is the lack of people to interact with regularly; emotional loneliness, which is the lack of meaningful relationships or someone to confide in; and existential loneliness, which is a deep feeling of being disconnected from the world, says Hillevi Busch, Senior Analyst at the Public Health Agency of Sweden.

Of the Swedish population, 41 % live in single households, 23 % report mild loneliness, while 13 % report having no close friends, and 3 % experience severe loneliness.

– The risk factors for loneliness include living alone, being young or old, being outside the labour market, and having health problems or a disability.

Loneliness among children is more common among girls than boys, and a low perceived socioeconomic status is also correlated with feeling lonely. Hillevi

Busch points out that there is a relative lack of research on loneliness in children and adolescents compared to loneliness in older people, making it harder to evaluate interventions.

Busch calls for joint societal action to combat loneliness, involving the government, agencies, regions and municipalities, civil society, and enterprises, all working together.

– We believe that if the whole society comes together, we can reduce loneliness and create social connectedness.

> **The most important thing for reducing loneliness is participating in regular activities with other people.**
>
> – Guri Idsø Viken, Senior Political Adviser at Frivillighet Norge

GURI IDSØ VIKEN, Senior Political Adviser at Frivillighet Norge: How NGOs are continuously fighting the most dangerous threats to our health

In Nordic welfare societies, much focus is on government initiatives. However, NGOs also play a significant and growing role by complementing government efforts in addressing and preventing loneliness and social isolation.

– The most important thing for reducing loneliness is participating in regular activities with other people.

Guri Idsø Viken, Senior Political Adviser at the umbrella organisation Frivillighet Norge, highlights the role of NGOs in providing regular activities and targeted efforts. These efforts cover areas beyond government responsibility, with a focus on prevention rather than treatment.

Frivillighet Norge has identified six barriers for participation in NGOs: economic constraints, where individuals cannot afford participation; knowledge gaps regarding where to participate; time pressures due to busy schedules, necessitating clear time expectations; cultural considerations to ensure culture does not hinder participation; accessibility issues, ensuring physical mobility does not prevent involvement; and providing support and follow-up, ensuring individuals feel welcomed and cared for.

Frivillighet Norge collaborates with other Nordic partners and emphasises that regular activities yield the best results. Therefore, funding for regular activities should be prioritised over project funding when supporting an NGO.

– Regular activities are what combat loneliness the most.

Guri Idsø Viken also points out that people are often reluctant to join activities specifically aimed at combatting loneliness.

– They prefer to meet others who share their interests and engage in regular activities. Offer them that and they will be happy.

Panel conversation on the prevention of loneliness and social isolation

The final panel conversation of the conference focused on the preventive strategies that should be implemented to combat increasing loneliness in the Nordic countries. Despite research showing that severe loneliness can have the same negative impact on health as alcohol abuse or heavy smoking, the panellists agreed that loneliness is not treated as an equally severe health hazard in our societies.

– I think we are overlooking the health risks of loneliness. But at least now we have the data, so we can start looking into it, says Margrét Lilja Guðmundsdóttir from Planet Youth in Iceland who joined the panel conversation.

Guri Idsø Viken from Frivillighet Norge pointed out that efforts to reduce loneliness do not always reach everyone affected. The focus is often on those lacking friends, while forgetting that people can also feel lonely in a crowd.

– Through social media, we are surrounded by people all the time, but despite this, many still feel lonely. It's important to help people step away from their screens so they can grow their networks in the real world.

The connection between excessive screen time and loneliness was identified several times throughout the panel conversation.

– Lack of mental health, lack of sleep, too much screen time, and loneliness – all of this is connected, says Margrét Lilja Guðmundsdóttir.

Hillevi Busch from the Public Health Agency of Sweden pointed out that preventive measures and strategies to reduce loneliness revolve around meeting places and social activities. Sometimes, solving a practical problem can initiate the process of combatting loneliness.

– The church is an organisation that can offer practical help in some matters, such as providing a meal. However, when we gather around a social problem, it can often initiate deeper conversations and help solve a social issue as well.

Hillevi Busch says the solution to combatting loneliness in society as a whole lies in a holistic approach where different levels of society work together.

– Government organisations can legitimise the question. Different levels in society have different mandates and can contribute in unique ways. This is what we need.

Margrét Lilja Guðmundsdóttir emphasises that part of the solution should always include listening to young people and acknowledging that they are facing challenges unprecedented in previous generations. Additionally, part of the solution also lies with the parents, who both need and expect assistance.

– The most important thing is to gather knowledge and bring it to the general public. This is not common knowledge for everyone.

About the publication

Good and equal health in the Nordics: Conference report

The digital conference was part of the 2024 Swedish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers. It was organised in collaboration between the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs and the Nordic Welfare Centre. The conference was funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

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