

**PROJECT “DEVELOPMENT OF THE MODEL FOR THE STRENGTHENING OF THE CAPACITIES TO IDENTIFY AND REDUCE HEALTH INEQUALITIES“
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Sub-activity 1.1.1.5 “Preparation, issuance and distribution of methodical recommendations about monitoring of health inequalities, interpretation and application of results“

Monitoring and assessment of health inequalities

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Health inequalities exist globally, in the European Union (EU), between countries and within countries. The emergence of health inequalities is related to the uneven distribution of the social, environmental and economic conditions, which determine the disease risk, people's ability to prevent diseases or possibilities for access to the necessary services. Health inequalities are also a relevant problem in Lithuania. The objectives raised in the Lithuanian health strategy of 2014-2015: to extend the average life expectancy, to improve the righteousness of the health relations and quality of life, health of the population, to reduce health inequalities, however, deepening social inequality of the population has a negative impact on the process of the implementation of these objectives. Lithuania is one of the EU Member States, in which one of the biggest indicators of income inequality and their growth trends are observed. According to the data of the Lithuanian Department of Statistics, every fifth resident of Lithuania, every second unemployed, every third rural resident or a large family, and every fourth 65 years old or older person are facing the risk of poverty. Such people are not able to devote enough income to create high-quality living conditions and improve health. Lithuania, in the context of the EU countries, also is distinguished by one of the largest differences in mortality and average life expectancy between men and women.

The objectives of the National Public Healthcare Development Programme for 2016-2023 are also focused on the extension of the years of healthy life, physical and mental health promotion, healthy lifestyle and its culture development, health literacy promotion of the Lithuanian population. In order to achieve the set objectives, it is necessary to identify and apply the specific measures needed to the country, and this requires an objective analysis of the situation.

The purpose of the methodological recommendations “Monitoring and Assessment of Health Inequalities” is to help the public health monitoring specialists, who work in various sectors, to collect, monitor and assess the basic indicators of health inequalities. This publication can be used as an auxiliary

tool in identifying the key problems of health inequalities in municipalities, in targeted planning and application of the interventions of the health promotion and the reduction of its inequalities.

The methodological recommendations “Monitoring and Assessment of Health Inequalities” provide the information on the three categories intended for monitoring health inequalities: demographic (age, gender, place of residence, nationality), social (education, occupation, living conditions), economic (income). Many demographic health disparities, such as gender and age, are considered to be regular and unavoidable, but such disparities as, for example, uneven availability to the health care services, may be reduced.

The data used for monitoring and assessment of health inequalities are discussed in the recommendations: 1) the official statistical data, including the indicators of morbidity, mortality and health care system availability, demand and equity; 2) lifestyle indicators, which are collected in carrying out surveys. The information related to the monitoring of health inequalities is provided in the Annexes of the recommendations - the indicators of the assessment of health inequalities, the questionnaires of the adult and children lifestyle surveys and the access to the healthcare services.

Health inequalities are often complex and ambiguous, but they can be measured and assessed by using a few basic statistical methods. The publication presents the principles and methods of the assessment of health inequalities by which health inequalities in population can be quantitatively assessed (the calculation and interpretation of the absolute and relative change, ratio, the attributable risk and the population attributable risk, the health inequalities evaluation indexes).

In carrying out the monitoring of health and its inequalities, it is important that the data would be provided to the consumer by the accessible and understandable means. One of such ways is the portrayal of the indicators of health inequalities. The methodological recommendations present the basic ways of the health inequalities imaging (cartography, H. Shernoff’s face method, etc.), describe the health inequalities imaging system “SveNas”.