

25 September 2020

SUMMARY OF A RECOMMENDATION BY COHERE FINLAND ON FACTORS SUPPORTING LIFESTYLE CHANGES WHEN USING METHODS FOR PROVIDING LIFESTYLE COUNSELLING AND SUPPORTING SELF-MANAGEMENT OF HEALTH TO REDUCE THE RISK OF DISEASES CAUSED BY AN UNHEALTHY DIET AND INSUFFICIENT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The Council for Choices in Health Care in Finland (COHERE Finland) adopted the recommendation at its meeting on 25 September 2020.

The recommendation applies to patients whose lifestyle habits related to diet and physical activity have put them at a high risk of chronic diseases and who have not been able to change their lifestyles without outside help or intervention in a way that supports health. The recommendation is targeted at both the parties responsible for organising healthcare and service providers, with the aim of supporting patients to change their lifestyles.

An unhealthy diet and insufficient physical activity increase the risk of serious chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, musculoskeletal disorders, memory disorders, depression and certain types of cancer. Problems related to an unhealthy diet and insufficient physical activity impair the quality of life and work ability of individuals and have a huge impact on our national economy. Their treatment also places a considerable burden on healthcare services.

When preparing the recommendation, efforts were made to identify the factors that help motivate patients and commit them to making lifestyle changes. According to the recommendation, the methods that have proven to be effective in supporting positive lifestyle changes related to diet and physical activity fall within the range of public health services. Based on scientific evidence, it can be concluded that **the methods found to be effective in dietary and physical activity guidance have the following six components in common: assessing the initial situation, exchanging information, setting targets, drawing up a plan, monitoring, and providing feedback.**

The recommendation gives examples of methods examined in Finland that contain the above-mentioned components and have scientifically proven to be effective. It is essential that the methods included in the range of public health services contain all these components.

In addition to this, it is important to ensure that:

- **different operators have agreed on cooperation practices:**

In accordance with the agreed division of duties, the whole care chain from primary healthcare to specialised medical care provides lifestyle counselling and self-management of health to patients who are at a high risk of chronic diseases due to an unhealthy diet or insufficient physical activity. Responsibility for providing such counselling rests with a multiprofessional team.

- **a systematic action plan for lifestyle counselling is in place:**

Service providers have in place a systematic action plan for lifestyle counselling, setting out the methods used for lifestyle counselling and self-management of health.

- **patients are provided with personalised care tailored to their own needs:**



Patients' situations are always individual, and both care and support must be flexible, taking into account patients' needs and capacity. Support can be given individually, in groups or online, provided that it contains the components mentioned above.

- **personnel using the method are competent:**

Personnel must have sufficient competence so that the patient's unhealthy dietary habits and insufficient physical activity can be identified and the effective methods can be used to help and encourage the patient to make lifestyle changes.

- **an entry is made to the patient data system stating that all the components were fulfilled.**

The requirement for providing counselling systematically and monitoring the related effects is that the matters which have been attended to are recorded in the patient data system.

It is worth noting that not only the healthcare sector but also other municipal operators, the third sector and the private sector play an important role in a successful lifestyle counselling process. Effective links should be in place between different operators, both between the operators within the healthcare sector and with operators outside the healthcare sector, to ensure that patients receive the sufficient support that they need and are offered opportunities to change their lifestyles.

This is a summary of a recommendation adopted by the Council for Choices in Health Care in Finland (COHERE Finland). The actual recommendation and the related background material are available in Finnish on the [website of COHERE Finland](#).

The summary of the recommendation is also available in [Finnish](#) and [Swedish](#) on the website.

The Council for Choices in Health Care in Finland (COHERE Finland) works in conjunction with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, and its task is to issue recommendations on services that should be included in the range of public health services. Further information about service choices in health care is available on [the COHERE Finland website](#).

