

Projects conducted with health promotion funds

This audit concerned activities supported with health promotion funds. Such funds have been included in the state budget since the early 1970s, under different names. Funds have been used to support anti-smoking projects and health education under the Tobacco Act, the prevention of substance abuse under the Temperance Work Act, alcohol information and education, and the prevention of drug abuse and associated problems. In the early 2000s funds totalled about 7.5 million euros a year, then Parliament raised the level to over 9 million euros in 2007 and 2008.

The audit examined the use of funds, the allocation of funds to different recipients and functions, monitoring and evaluation procedures, project dissemination and the relation between results and the objectives on the grounds on which funds were appropriated.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has approved annual plans for the use of funds. On the basis of the Temperance Work Act and the Tobacco Act the ministry has entrusted the preparation of annual plans and the monitoring and control of the use of funds to the Finnish Centre for Health Promotion, the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health up to 2006 and the National Public Health Institute beginning in 2007. According to findings this transfer can be considered problematic from the viewpoint of good governance, since the Finnish Centre for Health Promotion handles applications from its member organizations as well as any other applications and is itself a user of funds.

Roughly half of funds have been used each year for projects that are conducted by the state administration. Users have included the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health, the National Public Health Institute, the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, the state provincial offices, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the National Product Control Agency for Welfare and Health, Statistics Finland and universities. Only about half of funds have been used as actual state aids, although funds are

classified as state aids in the budget. A little over 40% of funds have gone to the Finnish Centre for Health Promotion and other field organizations. About 16% of funds have been used for projects conducted by the Finnish Centre for Health Promotion. Other organizations' share has been 25-28%.

Activities of a continuing nature have also been regular recipients of funds. In the state administration funds have been used for functions that naturally fall under the relevant authorities' regulations and should be financed from appropriations for operational expenses. Funds have been used to finance research and development activities in several state agencies and units, for instance. Clear grounds have not been presented in the budget for the use of funds for these research and development activities. According to regulations concerning general appropriations, state agencies and units are not eligible to receive state aids. In the opinion of the National Audit Office, the purpose and use of health promotion funds should be clarified.

From the viewpoint of project administration and financial management, it is not appropriate for activities of a permanent nature to be kept in project form with the help of project grants. If activities that receive support are considered worth putting on a permanent footing, support should be regarded as operational aid or in the case of state authorities operational expenses.

The effectiveness of funds is influenced by numerous external factors and the operating environment. Some projects are well planned, well implemented and successful. On the other hand funds have also been used for projects or to assist activities in which results or benefits are not clearly visible. Reporting and evaluating results has varied from one project to another. The evaluation of projects has failed to review larger programmes or themes.

The operating environment has changed since the Temperance Work Act and the Act on Measures to Restrict Smoking were approved. New actors have appeared in the health promotion field, along with innovative research and development activities. The results and effectiveness of activities financed with health promotion funds should be evaluated as a whole. The expansion of actors and experts could provide opportunities for alternative uses of funds.