

Editorial/Uvodnik

One hundred years of public health in Slovenia Sto let javnega zdravja v Sloveniji

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Health is considered one of the most fundamental values in human life. When we are healthy, we strive to maintain or strengthen it as much as possible, but when we are ill, we strive to regain it as quickly and as fully as possible. In this pursuit of health, we are influenced by both our natural and social environments. The collective efforts to optimise health, whether by individuals, the population as a whole or specific population groups, are referred to as health protection (Zaletel - Kragelj, Eržen, & Premik, 2011; Gabrovec, 2020).

Public health is the science and mastery of disease prevention, health promotion and life extension through organised efforts of society. It is a concept that focuses not only on the absence of disease, but also on mental, physical, emotional and social well-being. It can be considered simultaneously as a social institution, a discipline and a practice. This is only one of its several definitions. Among the more recent definitions that take into account the evolution of public health towards the so-called new public health are those proposed by Julio Frenk and the United States Institute of Medicine (Zaletel - Kragelj, Eržen, & Premik, 2011; Gabrovec, 2020).

According to Julio Frenk, a contemporary public health expert, public health (more specifically, new public health) is a multidisciplinary field of research that introduces research advances in the biomedical and social sciences related to population health. It encompasses both the epidemiological study of population health conditions and the study of the social response to these conditions, along with the particular ways in which this response manifests itself in the health care system (Frenk, 1993).

The 2002 US Institute of Medicine report states that public health encompasses the activities undertaken collectively by society to create optimal conditions for human health. It emphasises that public health

includes the efforts, science, art and approaches used by all sectors of society to ensure, protect, maintain and improve the health of the population (Institute of Medicine, 2002).

The 100-year journey of public health in Slovenia began in 1923, when Dr. Ivo Pirc became the director of the then Institute of Hygiene (Higienski zavod) in Ljubljana. Over the course of the following century, the house of eight names, today's National Institute of Public Health (NIJZ), was to be marked by important milestones in development and professional life that would profoundly influence public health in Slovenia.

As we celebrate 100 years of organised public health efforts, we often look back to the very beginnings. The foundations laid by the pioneers of public health remain visible and we continue to build upon them. Even though the activities were different then, we can still draw some parallels to today's practices. Even then, professional autonomy was extremely important to ensure successful outcomes. This has not changed to this day. The only distinction lies in that the activities undertaken today utilise modern opportunities to address health threats (Eržen, 2023).

For successful implementation and further development of our existing tasks, development of new work areas and methods, and modernisation of our work processes, we have created an efficient organisational structure that enables close cooperation between individual experts on various projects and programmes. Such an open and flexible organisation responds to the requirements of each work process and supports the efficiency and effectiveness of our efforts. A review of our activities shows that we have succeeded in pooling our resources and ensuring transparent and professional work. Through partnerships, cooperation and intensive international engagement, we have achieved remarkable development and expansion of public health in Slovenia. Every year, public health

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activities are further developed and expanded. There is a growing awareness that public health is not the sole responsibility of health organisations. Rather, successful change is only possible if the necessary changes are implemented in every sector of society. This is also demonstrated by the publication entitled *Public Health Achievements in Slovenia*, which outlines our sustainable approach to action as a prerequisite for continuing the successful transformation of societal conditions for the benefit of public health (Eržen, 2023).

On 30 May 2023, we held a celebratory event that was not only a symbolic commemoration, but also an opportunity to reflect on a century of commitment to public health. In the not too distant past, we were faced with an immense challenge that required public health to focus primarily on the monitoring of infectious diseases, with prevention and control of infectious diseases being one of the most significant public health achievements of the 21st century.

In addition to infectious disease management, public health has also been enriched by other important milestones and achievements. These include laboratory diagnostics, identification and management of risks posed by non-communicable diseases such as addictions, harmful alcohol and tobacco use, mental health problems and unhealthy working or environmental conditions that pose a risk or even a direct threat to people's health. Today, information reference tools that allow the analysis of the health status of populations are indispensable, while best practises, professional development and intersectoral collaboration in national and international frameworks continue to improve our capabilities.

The demand for public health is increasing and will continue to do so in the future. Demographic changes, chronic diseases and multimorbidity are only part of the changing circumstances that require a comprehensive, holistic and multidisciplinary approach. Our future efforts must therefore focus on three areas. First, we need to address future challenges on the basis of a century's worth of public health knowledge and experience. Second, we aim to focus on building citizens' trust in public health as our fundamental tool for action. Without this trust, our recommendations, interventions, guidelines, etc. will have limited reach. And of course, it is no secret that this trust was compromised during the recent pandemic. The third key aspect is collaboration. As a tertiary public health institution, the NIJZ has a progressive role as a cornerstone and promoter of public health in Slovenia.

Slovenian translation/Prevod v slovenščino

Človek običajno dojema zdravje kot eno svojih najvišjih vrednot. Če je zdrav, ga želi po svojih najboljših močeh ohraniti ali celo okrepiti, če pa zbolj,

si ga želi čim prej in v čim večji meri povrniti. Pri tem je odvisen tudi od svojega naravnega in družbenega življenjskega okolja. V tem smislu lahko varovanje zdravja opredelimo kot skupna prizadevanja za optimalno zdravje, ne glede na to, ali gre za zdravje posameznika ali celotnega prebivalstva oziroma določenih prebivalstvenih skupin (Zaletel - Kragelj, Eržen, & Premik, 2011; Gabrovec, 2020).

Javno zdravje je znanost in spretnost preprečevanja bolezni, krepitev zdravja in podaljševanja življenja s pomočjo organiziranih naporov družbe. Je koncept, ki ni usmerjen le v odsotnost bolezni, ampak tudi v duševno, telesno, čustveno in socialno ugodje. Je istočasno družbena institucija, disciplina in praksa. Poleg te opredelitve obstajajo še številne druge. Med novejšimi, ki upoštevajo razvoj javnega zdravja v smeri tako imenovanega novega javnega zdravja, sta tudi opredelitvi Julija Frenka in Medicinskega inštituta Združenih držav Amerike (ZDA) [United States Institute of Medicine] (Zaletel - Kragelj, Eržen, & Premik, 2011; Gabrovec, 2020).

Julio Frenk, ugledni strokovnjak s področja javnega zdravja, pravi, da je javno zdravje (natančneje novo javno zdravje) multidisciplinarno raziskovalno področje, ki uvaja raziskovalne dosežke biomedicinskih in družboslovnih znanosti, povezanih z zdravjem med prebivalstvom. Obsega tako epidemiološko proučevanje stanj, povezanih z zdravjem prebivalstva, kot tudi proučevanje odgovorov družbe na ta stanja, predvsem pa način odražanja teh odgovorov v sistemu zdravstvenega varstva (Frenk, 1993).

Medicinski inštitut ZDA v svojem poročilu iz leta 2002 navaja, da javno zdravje obsega dejavnosti, ki jih družba kolektivno izvaja za zagotovitev pogojev, v katerih bi ljudje lahko bili zdravi. V njem poudarja, da javno zdravje obsega napore, znanost, načine in pristope, ki jih uporabljajo vsi družbeni sektorji za zagotavljanje, zaščito, ohranjanje in krepitev zdravja prebivalstva (Institute of Medicine, 2002).

Leta 1923 je dr. Ivo Pirc v vlogi direktorja takratnega Higienskega zavoda v Ljubljani skupaj s sodelavci začel 100 let dolgo pot. V 100 letih so hišo osmih imen, ki danes nosi naziv Nacionalni inštitut za javno zdravje (NIJZ), oblikovali ključni razvojni in strokovni mejniki, ki so pomembno vplivali na javno zdravje v Sloveniji.

V času, ko obeležujemo 100. obletnico organiziranega delovanja na področju javnega zdravja, se velikokrat ozremo nazaj, prav na začetek. Temelji, ki so jih za delo na področju javnega zdravja postavili pionirji javnega zdravja, so še vedno vidni in na njih gradimo naprej. Seveda so bile dejavnosti v tistem času drugačne – pa vendar ne tako zelo, da ne bi bilo mogoče tudi danes, 100 let kasneje, poiskati vzporednic z današnjimi. Že v tistem času je bila strokovna neodvisnost izjemno pomembna za uspešno delo. To se ni spremenilo do danes. Drugačne so le posamezne dejavnosti, ki jih glede na sedanje možnosti razvijamo kot odgovor na grožnje zdravju (Eržen, 2023)

Za uspešno izvedbo in opravljanje dosedanjih nalog, kakor tudi za razvoj novih področij in metod dela ter posodabljanje procesov dela smo vzpostavili učinkovito organizacijsko strukturo, ki omogoča tesno sodelovanje posameznih strokovnjakov pri različnih projektih oziroma v okviru različnih programov. Odprt in fleksibilen način organiziranosti ustreza potrebam pri izvajanju posameznih delovnih procesov in podpira učinkovitost ter uspešnost delovanja. Pregled dejavnosti kaže na to, da smo uspeli združiti vire in zagotoviti transparentno delovanje, temelječe na strokovnosti. Preko sodelovanja z zunanjimi partnerji ter z intenzivnim mednarodnim udejstvovanjem in sodelovanjem smo dosegli izjemen razvoj in razmah javnega zdravja v Sloveniji. Vsako leto se dejavnost javnega zdravja razvija in širi naprej. Krepi se zavedanje, da javno zdravje ni stvar zdravstvenih organizacij, temveč lahko na uspešne spremembe računamo le, ko se spremeni delovanje v okviru posameznega družbenega sektorja. To dokazuje tudi pregled Dosežki v javnem zdravju v Sloveniji, ki nakazuje na trajnostno naravnano delovanje, kar je predpogoj za nadaljevanje uspešnega procesa spreminjanja družbenih razmer v dobro zdravja prebivalcev (Eržen, 2023)

30. maja 2023 smo gostili slavnostni dogodek, ki je bil poleg simbolne obeležitve tudi priložnost za refleksijo o stoletju dela na področju javnega zdravja. Nedolgo nazaj smo se znašli v izjemno težki preizkušnji, ko je bila vloga javnega zdravja osredotočena predvsem na področje spremljanja nalezljivih bolezni. Pri tem ravno preprečevanje in obvladovanje širjenja nalezljivih bolezni uvrščamo med najpomembnejše dosežke javnega zdravja v 21. stoletju.

Poleg obravnave nalezljivih bolezni javno zdravje bogatijo tudi drugi pomembni mejniki in dosežki. Mednje lahko zagotovo štejemo laboratorijsko diagnostiko, prepoznavanje in obvladovanje tveganj, ki jih predstavljajo nenalezljive bolezni, kot so odvisnosti, škodljiva raba alkohola, tobaka, duševne stiske, nezdrava delovna mesta ali okolja, ki z dejavniki tveganja, celo neposrednimi grožnjami zdravju, vplivajo na zdravje vseh. Brez referenčnih informacijskih orodij, ki omogočajo analizo zdravstvenega stanja prebivalstva, danes ne gre. Dodatno bogastvo predstavljajo dobre prakse,

strokovni razvoj ter medsektorsko sodelovanje v domačem in mednarodnem okolju.

Potreba po javnem zdravstvu se povečuje in ta trend je pričakovati tudi v prihodnosti. Demografska slika, kronične bolezni ter multimorbidnosti so le del spremenjenih okoliščin, ki zahtevajo širok, celosten in multidisciplinaren pristop. Naše nadaljnje delo bo tako usmerjeno v tri področja. Najprej v izzive prihodnosti na temelju vseh spoznanj in izkušenj stoletnega dela na področju javnega zdravja. Nadalje smo si zastavili cilj krepitve zaupanja v javno zdravje. Zaupanje naših prebivalcev in prebivalcev je naše temeljno orodje dela. Brez tega zaupanja imajo naša priporočila, intervencije, smernice ipd. le omejen doseg. In seveda ni skrivnost, da je bilo to zaupanje ob pretekli pandemiji načeto. Kot tretje pomembno področje lahko izpostavimo sodelovanje. NIJZ se kot terciarna ustanova javnega zdravja podaja na pot progresivne vloge gradnika in povezovalca javnega zdravja v Sloveniji.

Conflict of interest/Nasprotje interesov

The author is the director of the National Institute of Public Health./Avtor je direktor Nacionalnega inštituta za javno zdravje.

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Cite as/Citirajte kot:

Gabrovec, B. (2023). One hundred years of public health in Slovenia. *Obzornik zdravstvene nege*, 57(4), 236–238. <https://doi.org/10.14528/sn.2023.57.4.3261>