

Policy Area Health Steering Group
Seventh Meeting
11 May 2026
Tallinn, Estonia

Title	Meeting minutes from the 7th meeting of the PA Health Steering Group
Submitted by	NDPHS Secretariat/PA Health Coordinator

1. Opening of the meeting and the adoption of the agenda 10:30–10:40

Ms. Agne Nettan-Sepp, Chair of the Policy Area (PA) Health Steering Group from the Ministry of Health, Estonia, opened the meeting, welcomed participants and initiated a short introduction round.

The meeting **adopted** the agenda as submitted in the Provisional Annotated Agenda (SG 7/1).

2. Updates from the PA Health Coordinators 10:40–11:00

Ms. Wiebke Marcus, NDPHS Secretariat, provided an introduction to the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the role of Policy Area Health. The presentation outlined the Strategy's coordination framework and the involvement of national, regional and local authorities, civil society, research institutions and other stakeholders.

The presentation highlighted the importance of connecting regional cooperation with available funding and introduced the two main actions guiding PA Health's work:

- Strengthening community resilience.
- Strengthening institutional and stakeholder capacity.

3. The BSR Mental Health Platform: architecture and policy outreach 11:00–11:15

Ms. Ülla-Karin Nurm, Director of the NDPHS Secretariat, introduced the BSR Mental Health Platform. She outlined the growing demand for mental health and psychosocial support across the region and the need to complement healthcare services with approaches involving communities and other sectors.

The Platform brings together results from 13 projects to support the wider use of existing solutions through policy recommendations, practical implementation support, exchange of good practices and mutual learning. Its work is organised around four thematic areas:

- Mental health at school and at work.

- Mental health across the life course.
- Physical activity.
- Arts and culture.

The presentation highlighted that effective approaches already exist but often remain fragmented, local and difficult to scale. The Platform aims to connect these initiatives and make their results more accessible and useful to decision-makers.

4. Highlights of initiatives featured in the Platform 11:15–12:00

Ms. Anneli Vares, VATEK, presented the organisation's work to strengthen mental health and well-being in Estonia through community cooperation, advocacy and public awareness. She highlighted VATEK's contribution to national and municipal policy development, including recommendations on long-term planning, cross-sectoral cooperation, sustainable financing and prevention. Within the BSR Mental Health Platform, VATEK contributes to national knowledge transfer and policy outreach, as well as the thematic work on mental health at school and at work.

Ms. Krista Mulenok, NGO Golden League, presented the Solutions for Age-Friendly Employer (SAFE) project. The project supports age-friendly workplaces in the health and well-being sector and aims to improve employment opportunities and working conditions for employees aged 55 and above. Activities include developing and piloting an organisational self-assessment tool and a package of practical solutions, alongside training, knowledge exchange and policy recommendations. The presentation emphasised employee involvement and the need to approach age-friendliness as an ongoing organisational process.

Ms. Beata Fabisiak, Poznan University of Life Sciences, presented examples of how inclusive design and supportive physical environments can contribute to mental health and well-being across the life course. Drawing on KidsLikeUs, SchoolChanger and the BaltSe@nioR projects, she introduced sensory garden solutions, participatory approaches to redesigning school spaces, and guidance and demonstration spaces for age-friendly public environments. The examples illustrated the value of involving users and bringing together expertise from design, education, social care and health.

Lunch break: 12:00–12:45

5. Mental Health Strategy in Estonia 12:45–13:05

Ms. Minni Timberg, Head of Mental Health Policy, Ministry of Social Affairs, Estonia, presented Estonia's Mental Health Action Plan 2023–2026. She outlined key challenges, including growing mental health needs, particularly among young people, insufficient prevention and community support, fragmented services and workforce shortages.

The Action Plan covers five areas: sector development and innovation; promotion, prevention and self-help; community support; mental health services; and crisis preparedness. Current priorities include developing a stepped care model for anxiety and depression, introducing a Mental Health in All Policies approach, and strengthening

community-based interventions, including the Circle of Friends intervention for older people and the ABC intervention for young people.

The presentation also highlighted regional differences, loneliness among young people, and the need to involve people with lived experience more closely in policymaking. Ms. Timberg emphasised the importance of promoting mental health in the settings where people live, work and play.

6. Roundtable: Mental health promotion in BSR countries 13:05–14:15

Participants shared national priorities and challenges in mental health promotion and people's well-being. Contributions were presented by:

- Mr. Owe Österbacka, Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, Finland.
- Ms. Sara Fritzell, Public Health Agency of Sweden.
- Mr. Jörgen Gyllenblad, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Sweden
- Ms. Venja Kampen, Free Hanseatic City of Hamburg – Ministry of Social Affairs, Germany.
- Ms. Liene Sīle, National Centre for Mental Health, Latvia.
- Ms Ingrida Grincevičiūtė, Ministry of Health, Lithuania

Healthy break: 14:15–14:25

7. BSR Mental Health Project Steering Group 14:25–14:40

The NDPHS Secretariat introduced the aims and role of the BSR Mental Health Project Steering Group and its Terms of Reference, circulated prior to the meeting as document SG 7/2.

The meeting adopted the Terms of Reference (SG 7/2).

8. Group discussion: Ensuring policy impact of the BSR Mental Health Platform 14:40–15:25

The group discussion, facilitated by the NDPHS Secretariat, focused on how the BSR Mental Health Platform could support policy development at the national level.

Participants were invited to consider how the Platform's activities and results could respond to national needs and reach relevant policymakers.

9. Wrap-up and closing of the meeting 15:25–15:30

The Chair thanked participants for their contributions and closed the formal meeting at the Ministry of Social Affairs.

The programme included a study visit to the Estonian Health Museum and its temporary exhibition "Bye-bye, Youth!", exploring diverse experiences of ageing and challenging age-related stereotypes.

ANNEX: List of participants

Agne Nettan-Sepp (Chair)
Helen Sõber
Minni Timberg
Ministry of Social Affairs, Estonia

Päivi Karvinen (online)
Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland

Artūrs Oto Kivlinš (online)
Ministry of Health, Latvia

Ingrida Grincevičiūtė
Ministry of Health, Lithuania

Siv Svardal (online)
Ministry of Health and Care Services, Norway

Jörgen Gyllenblad
Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Sweden

Friederike Heß
Kai Fritze
Venja Kampen (online)
Free Hanseatic City of Hamburg – Ministry of Social Affairs

Ülla-Karin Nurm
Wiebke Marcus
Saara Rissanen Fridén (online)
Zane Vilnīte
Pille Strauss
Lukas Lorenzen
Emily Maresch
NDPHS Secretariat

Nina Kvello
DG REGIO, European Commission

Liene Sīle
National Centre for Mental Health, Latvia

Owe Österbacka
Finnish Institute of Occupational Health

Sara Fritzell
Public Health Agency of Sweden

Anneli Vares
Eve Järve
VATEK – Estonian Mental Health and Well-being Coalition

Beata Fabisiak
Poznan University of Life Sciences, Poland

Krista Mulenok
Golden League, Estonia

Kaire Luuk
Saue Municipality, Estonia

Ghieth Alkhateeb
NeuroLandscape, Poland