



**POLICY BRIEF measure statement 2023**

## **IMPACTFUL PROMOTION OF NUTRITIONAL HEALTH THROUGH COOPERATION**

This Policy Brief measure statement describes how the promotion of nutritional health is a component of the promotion of wellbeing and health and how it is implemented in cooperation with wellbeing services counties and municipalities, organisations and other actors.

**The impact of nutritional health promotion is enhanced with:**

- A.** Activities in all age and population groups, accounting for people in need of special support.
- B.** Agreed structures and practices for activities. Using a lifestyle counselling checklist in the planning of activities in wellbeing services counties.
- C.** Evidence-based methods and practices in the promotion of nutritional health, and recommendations as the basis of nutritional quality in meals.
- D.** Supporting nutritional health promotion work by systematic communication and continuing education organised at regular intervals.
- E.** Verifying the promotion of nutritional health and monitoring and evaluating its impact regularly in a mutually agreed way.

The current social welfare and health care structures and developing interface work offer an excellent opportunity to address the promotion of nutritional health among local residents in different age and population groups as part of the wide-ranging promotion of wellbeing and health.

Food choices play an essential role in safeguarding health and wellbeing, preventing chronic diseases, promoting ecological, economic and social sustainability, and mitigating and adapting to climate change. Food-related risk factors account for about 18% of deaths in Finland. Obesity is a condition that particularly increases the disease burden and increases health care costs. The potential that nutrition holds for disease prevention, treatment and rehabilitation is particularly related to obesity, cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, musculoskeletal disorders, depression, various forms of cancer, memory disorders and oral health. In addition, preventing the risk of malnutrition related to ageing and illnesses, and providing related early identification and nutritional care are cost-impactful measures and treatment.

It is important to create solutions that impact nutrition and the environment in cooperation with different administrative branches. Dietary habits that promote health and ecological sustainability are supported and made possible in people's everyday lives. Measures to promote nutritional health also generate regional vitality to a broad extent and with far-reaching effects.



#### Info box

**The promotion of nutritional health** means using various nutritional measures to promote wellbeing and health in different age and population groups. When promoting nutritional health, the aim is to safeguard children's healthy growth and development, improve the work ability and functional capacity of working-age people, support functional capacity and coping at home among older adults, increase health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities between population groups.

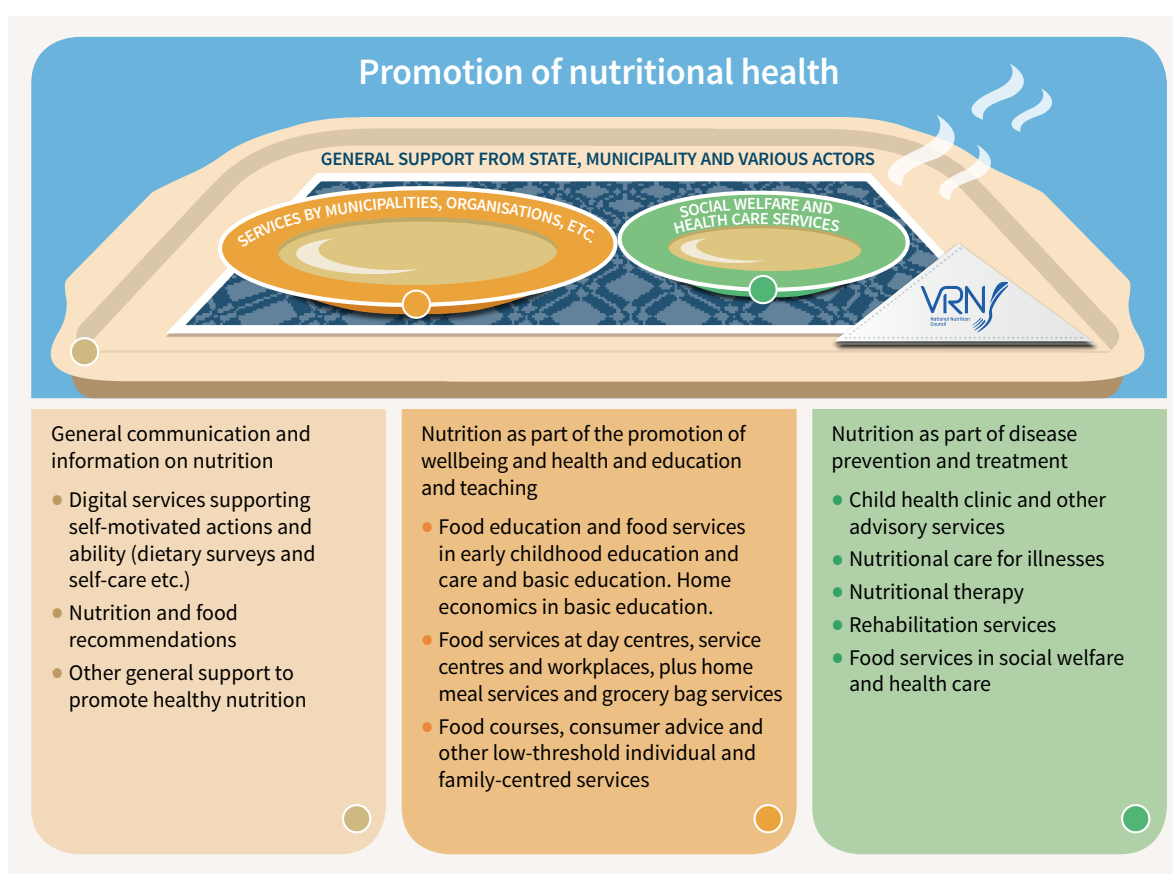
**Interface work in the promotion of wellbeing and health:** Interfaces are functional boundaries between two or more organisations and points of cooperation between actors such as wellbeing services counties, municipalities, service providers, different sectors and organisations. Customers pass through interfaces when going from one service provider to another. An interface can also be used to provide low-threshold services that bring different service providers together under one roof. Interface work can also involve establishing care and service pathways, such as a nutrition rehabilitation pathway that starts at a hospital and leads to monitored outpatient care and then to a physical activity group offering support for both nutrition and physical activity, arranged by a municipality or organisation.

## PROMOTING NUTRITIONAL HEALTH IS PART OF WELLBEING AND HEALTH

Promoting wellbeing and health is a responsibility shared by wellbeing services counties, municipalities and other actors. Wellbeing services counties are responsible for organising health and social services and related promotion of nutritional health, which includes preventive measures, lifestyle guidance, illness-related nutritional care and counselling, and food services.

Municipalities' responsibilities include early childhood education and care and basic education (including food services, food education and home economics), sports and cultural services, employment services, immigrant integration and proactive housing services, all of which should include measures that maintain, promote and enable nutritional health.

Interface work is carried out in wellbeing services counties and municipalities together with organisations and other actors, such as non-profit organisations, liberal adult education (including adult education centres) and businesses in the sector. Especially many public health, patient and food sector organisations provide nutrition-related advice and educational services. Organisations can also act as social welfare and health care service providers, charitable actors or both, for example by offering rehabilitation, peer support, materials and expert by experience services. Comprehensive utilisation of services requires that services supporting the promotion of nutritional health are available in one place and that information about them is available, for example with service trays compiled on a website. The structures, actors, interfaces and services concerning nutritional health promotion and examples of related activities are described with a tray figure (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Promotion of nutritional health, interfaces and service examples

## Measures

### **A** The promotion of nutritional health targets all age and population groups, accounting for people in need of special support

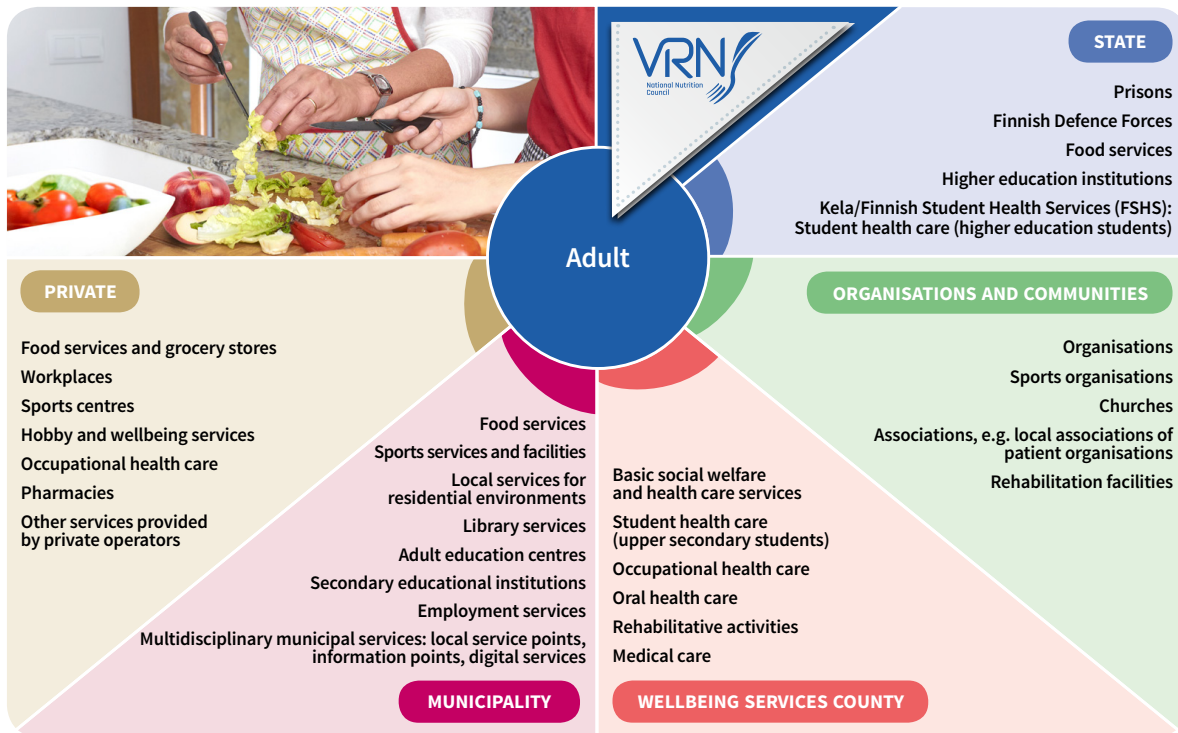
In the cooperation between municipalities and wellbeing services counties, it is important to ensure that the promotion of nutritional health is targeted at [residents of all ages](#) (in Finnish) and is also available for [groups in need of special support](#) (in Finnish) in an equal, timely and accessible manner. For example, plans for food services must ensure that these services are available for older people living in the local area, people who are not employed or enrolled in education and people who need special support. Promoting nutritional health must be an essential part of the promotion of wellbeing and health as well as targeted lifestyle counselling and the prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of illnesses.

Municipal operators, organisations and the private sector can promote residents' nutritional health as part of their basic duties. They can encourage health-promoting dietary habits among their customers, enforce people's ability to maintain existing good habits and help them adopt new ones. If concerns arise, it is important that operators have information on where to refer the customer. In addition, it is important that residents are generally aware of where they can access reliable information on nutrition and nutritional needs.

Health care services must ensure that each patient receives [nutritional care and counselling](#) based on scientific evidence and good treatment practices. The assumption is that health care professionals are familiar with the principles of health-promoting diets and preventing malnutrition and able to discuss these topics with customers in an encouraging manner. Highly demanding nutrition counselling and nutrition therapy fall under the services of [registered nutritionists](#) (in Finnish).

An agreement has to be made on the roles, competence requirements, cooperation and division of labour of different operators in order to ensure that services are produced in a timely manner and that no customer gets left behind, while avoiding overlapping work. Sufficient competence in nutritional health promotion, targeted training, up-to-date information support and quality monitoring improve operators' capacity to respond to customers' nutritional health needs. It is important to create practices for interfacing services across organisations and to ensure a common knowledge base and adequate specialist support for nutrition. Coordinating the promotion of nutritional health in wellbeing services counties requires a nutritionist or specialist engaged in health promotion.

Figure 2 depicts actors with the capacity to support the promotion of daily nutritional health among students, i.e. young adults, and working-age people. This figure and similar information on children/young people, families with children and older persons are described on the [website of the National Nutrition Council](#) (in Finnish).



**Figure 2.** Key actors in the promotion of nutritional health among adults (including students)

## **B** There are agreed structures and practices for nutritional health promotion

Assessments and decisions related to the promotion of nutritional health are made both in municipalities and in wellbeing services counties by different decision-making bodies. Preparations have to account for several laws, regulation documents and recommendations for promoting wellbeing, health and nutrition. To support decision-making related to nutrition, a guide on [promoting nutritional health as part of a management system and decision-making in municipalities](#) (in Finnish) has been prepared for municipalities and wellbeing services counties.

It is important to describe the promotion of residents' good nutrition, the related objectives and measures as well as monitoring and evaluation data as part of the [wellbeing plan and report by municipalities and wellbeing services counties](#) (in Finnish). [The nutrition plan](#) (in Finnish) can either be part of the wellbeing plan or attached to it as a separate document. Matters related to the promotion of nutritional health are discussed in municipalities and wellbeing services counties, for example in multidisciplinary welfare groups. The activities of these groups as well as the preparation of the wellbeing plan and report should involve people who specialise in nutrition, such as registered nutritionists, nutrition specialists and food service representatives. In addition, some wellbeing services counties and municipalities have a nutrition theme group or working groups focusing on the promotion of nutritional health among different age groups (children, schoolchildren, older people).

## Lifestyle counselling checklist supports nutritional health planning in wellbeing services counties

[The lifestyle counselling checklist](#) (in Finnish) is an excellent tool for planning nutritional health promotion activities. It is a tool for actors such as the nutrition theme group. The list includes the key considerations of lifestyle counselling that should be realised in the activities of wellbeing services counties. The list concretises tasks related to organising lifestyle counselling and how the content of lifestyle counselling (exercise, nutrition, sleep health, sobriety, addictions and cultural wellbeing) is realised.

### **C Evidence-based methods and practices are used in the promotion of nutritional health, and recommendations are the basis of nutritional quality in meals**

The promotion of nutritional health is based on [nutrition and food recommendations](#) issued by the National Nutrition Council to the population and its different age and target groups. The recommendations are based on Nordic Nutrition Recommendations ([NNR2023](#)), which are founded on robust scientific evidence.

The Council for Choices in Health Care in Finland has issued a recommendation 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 ([COHERE Finland recommendation, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2020](#)). The recommendation requires making impactful lifestyle counselling and self-care support methods available in public health care. The recommendation also states that “in lifestyle counselling and health promotion, other public actors play an important role alongside health care, such as municipal sports and fitness services or meals organised at schools and workplaces”.

The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) continuously [evaluates evidence-based practices in health and wellbeing promotion](#) and publishes [the assessed practices](#) (in Finnish) on its website alongside their evidence, impact and suitability for use. Evaluated practices related to the promotion of nutritional health include [the StopDia pilot targeted at the Somali population](#), [Feel4Diabetes](#), [the FINGER lifestyle programme](#), [the TYKEs Lifestyle coaching](#), [Tasty School](#) and [the Everyday hero](#) (in Finnish).

The National Nutrition Council’s website presents [four different types of service chains related to the nutritional needs of different target groups](#) (in Finnish). In addition, the website presents more than 30 different [practices/service chains](#) (in Finnish) that include measures to promote nutritional health as part of lifestyle counselling. When implementing practices, it is necessary to assess the suitability of the practice for the operations of the organisation/region.



Food provision in early childhood education and care and educational institutions is steered with [target group-specific food recommendations](#). The operations of food services procured for social welfare and health care services must be based on the [Guidelines for nutritional care](#) and the [Food recommendation for older adults](#). In addition, served meals must support illness-related nutritional care and rehabilitation processes. Meals served in [social services](#) (in Finnish), such as home, housing and institutional services, also reach people in need of special support and groups with nutrition-related risks, which reduces socio-economic disparity in the population's dietary habits and health.

[A Government decision-in-principle](#) (in Finnish) states that, when making public food service procurements, nutritional quality must be taken into account in accordance with the nutrition recommendations of the National Nutrition Council. Meals and meal components offered in the implementation of food services must meet the nutritional quality requirements specified in the food recommendations of each customer target group. Compliance with the recommendations is recorded in food service agreements.

[The procurement guide for responsible food services](#) (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry 2021) provides support for organising, purchasing and inviting tenders for food services. It also includes instructions with examples of activities and documents for procuring food services for municipalities and in the social welfare and health services sector.

## **D The promotion of nutritional health is strengthened through systematic communication and continuing education**

One way to prepare a nutritional health communication plan for a wellbeing services county is with an annual cycle. Impactful nutritional communication is systematic, regularly repeated and adapted to the needs and receptiveness of different target groups. To support communications, interactive situations can use food imagery and actual food. Food consumed at food services is a concrete model for health-promoting meals. Nutritionists are consulted when planning and implementing communications.

Wellbeing services counties and municipalities should produce a tray of local services consisting of individual, group- and community-level advisory services, care guidance services and food services related to the promotion of nutritional health as well as support services related to meals. The service tray is published online, and its address is widely communicated to both residents and service counselling professionals.

Communication related to nutritional health must be based on [national nutrition and food recommendations](#) (all recommendations are available online in English) and reliable research data. People are also interested in experiences related to nutrition. It is important to give experiences their rightful place: especially in lifestyle counselling and interactive group situations, there should be a focus on experiences, emotions, new ideas and reflection when striving for changes in dietary behaviour.

## Strengthening nutrition counselling requires local continuing education for professionals

Professionals' knowledge and skills regarding the promotion of nutritional health and its objectives, methods, practices and the lifestyle counselling of different age and population groups must be strengthened through continuing education. The basic vocational studies of social welfare and health care personnel often only include general education on nutrition and an introduction to nutrition recommendations. People have varied educational backgrounds. When agreeing on interface services, it must also be ensured that competence requirements are investigated and met and that personnel competence is ensured through continuing education.

The promotion of nutritional health requires a local continuing education plan. This effort can be supported by actors such as local vocational institutions, higher education institutions and nutritionists. For the preparation of the plan, it must be determined what kind of nutrition-related training personnel has already received and which matters and tasks require improved competence. Training plans should be drawn up separately for each professional group, but the multiprofessional nature of lifestyle counselling and nutritional care, service chains and interface work entail that at least some of the training is offered together to multiprofessional groups. Training also should increase cooperation capabilities and the division of labour between different professional groups.

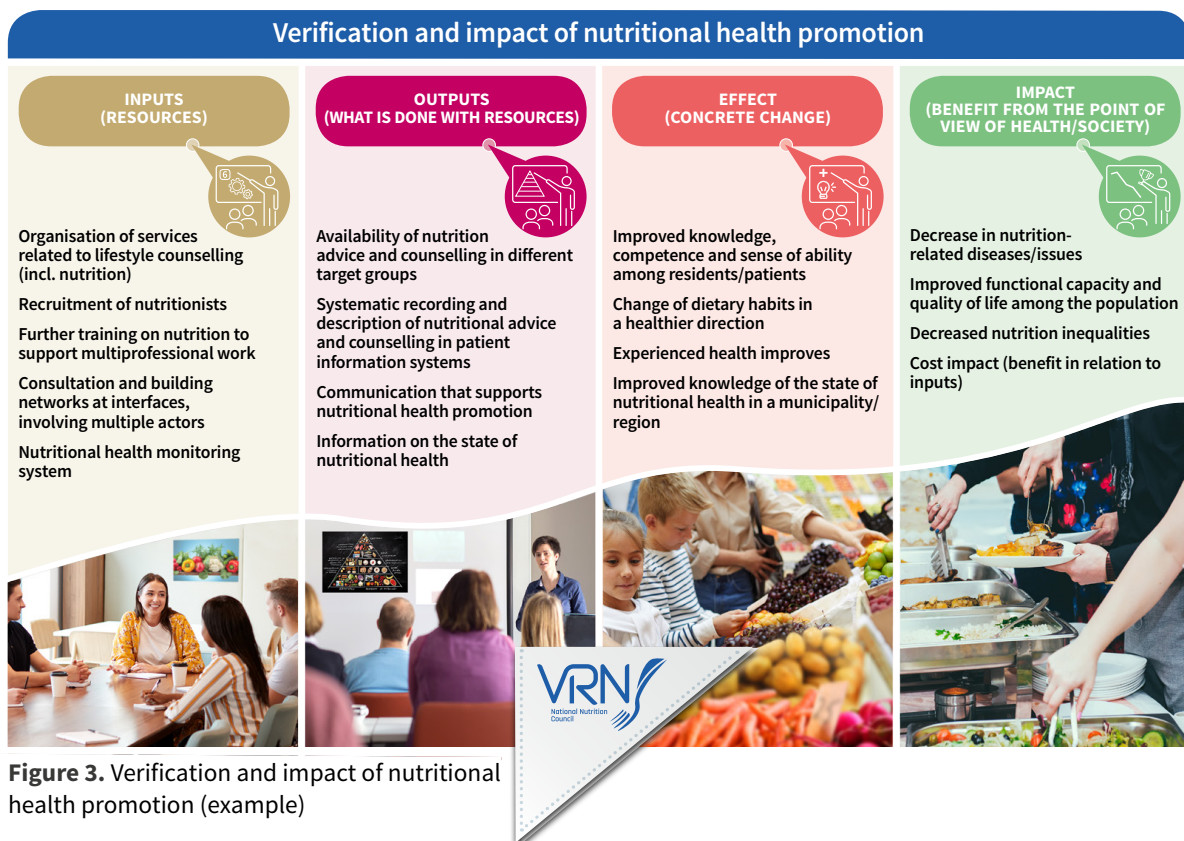
### **E The promotion of nutritional health is verified and its impact is monitored and evaluated regularly in a mutually agreed way**

When planning the promotion of nutritional health, it is essential to be familiar with the current state of operations and the local operating environment. The promotion of nutritional health is assessed not only from the perspective of nutrition and health information among different population groups, but also from the perspective of the food environment: what factors are there to enable or prevent the realisation of good nutrition? What kinds of measures are necessary, and are the selected measures impactful? It is particularly important to make an effort to consult and involve local residents. Functional examples where nutrition-related topics can be discussed include partnership forums, resident/customer panels and stakeholder cooperation with organisations and third sector actors.

Verifying the promotion of nutritional health for the residents of wellbeing services counties and assessing its impact require jointly agreed practices and effective monitoring systems. Decisions and agreed measures related to nutritional health are documented and their implementation is regularly reported in a regional welfare report or a nutritional health promotion report attached to it. Monitoring should also focus on how comprehensively nutrition recommendations are implemented and how methods and practices that are impactful are being used.

The promotion of nutritional health is monitored and evaluated with self-assessment tools, realization data on measures and national reports and register data. It is essential that there are uniform records of lifestyle counselling and nutritional care so that the information can be utilised in the development of internal activities and as regional and national comparison and statistical data. Impact assessment requires not only looking at outputs and effects but also investments in nutritional health promotion (Figure 3).





**Figure 3.** Verification and impact of nutritional health promotion (example)

## Monitoring tools and reporting

The National Nutrition Council and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities have jointly published [support material to enhance good nutrition](#) (in Finnish) among residents and customers. The material is intended for municipalities and regional groups and operators promoting wellbeing and health. The support material includes nutrition checklists intended for [municipalities](#) (in Finnish) and [social welfare and health care services](#) (in Finnish) for setting goals that support good nutrition, related decision-making and the monitoring of implementation. The checklists are a suitable tool for theme groups promoting wellbeing, health and nutrition as well as for decision-makers and officials responsible for related activities. The checklists are suitable for monitoring, and the results can be reported in a wellbeing report.

[A Current State](#) (in Finnish) tool has been produced to assess the current state of meals and food education in early childhood education and care and comprehensive schools. The tool brings visibility to the measures that are being done to promote nutritional health in early childhood education and care and comprehensive schools. The assessment with the tool is carried out in cooperation with education, teaching and food service personnel. The results can be examined for each unit and compared with [the situational data collected from each municipality and wellbeing services county](#) (in Finnish). The Current State assessment can be recorded in the wellbeing plan as an indicator of nutritional health promotion, and its results can be included in the wellbeing report.

The verification and impact of nutritional health promotion is described in Figure 3 and on the [Wellbeing through Nutrition website](#) (in Finnish). All [target group-specific meal recommendations](#) of the National Nutrition Council include guidelines and indicators for monitoring the implementation of meals, food education and nutritional counselling and care at units and at the municipal level, and for assessing their impact.

# MORE INFORMATION ON PROMOTING NUTRITIONAL HEALTH

In late autumn 2021, the National Nutrition Council appointed a working group tasked with supporting municipalities and wellbeing services counties in new social welfare and health care structures ([assignment by the National Nutrition Council](#)) (in Finnish). The results of this work have been published on the [National Nutrition Council website](#) (in Finnish). The working group was responsible for drawing up this Policy Brief.

The working group has worked in close cooperation with the Structures and Methods division of the Advisory Board for Public Health, for example by participating in the preparation of a [lifestyle counselling checklist](#) (in Finnish) for nutritional contents. The work of the working group has continued in the [Promoting physical activity and nutrition in new social welfare and health care structures and their interfaces](#) (in Finnish) division.

Promotion of nutritional health website (in Finnish): <https://www.ruokavirasto.fi/elintarvikkeet/terveytta-edistava-ruokavalio/ravitsemuksella-hyvinvointia/ravitsemusterveyden-edistaminen/>

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- 4 National Nutrition Council
- 5 Northern Ostrobothnia Hospital District (wellbeing services county of Northern Ostrobothnia as of 1 January 2023)
- 6 Finnish Heart Association
- 7 Finnish National Agency for Education
- 8 Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare
- 9 Central Finland Hospital District (wellbeing services county of Central Finland as of 1 January 2023)
- 10 Pirkanmaa Hospital District (wellbeing services county of Pirkanmaa as of 1 January 2023)
- 11 Ministry of Social Affairs and Health
- 12 Martha organisation
- 13 HUS
- 14 Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (Hyvinvointialueyhtiö Hyvil Oy as of 1 January 2023)
- 15 City of Kuopio
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