

# The Swedish Red Cross Health Policy

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This policy clarifies the Swedish Red Cross' approach to health and health interventions. Health is a fundamental right for all, regardless of gender, gender identity or expression, age, ethnicity, origin, religion or belief, disability, sexual orientation, or other backgrounds. Good and equal health is central to people's well-being and the sustainable development of society. Protecting life and health is part of the Red Cross Movement's core mission and as part of the Red Cross Movement, the Swedish Red Cross shall contribute to equal and good health where everyone everywhere has access to basic health care whenever they need it. This policy is in line with the Statues of the Swedish Red Cross, which state that the association shall "protect life and health and [...] work to prevent disease and promote health and social welfare...".

This policy applies to all elected officials, volunteers, employees, delegates, trainees, students, consultants, fee earners or others who have undertaken assignments for, or otherwise represent, the Swedish Red Cross in Sweden and/or abroad. In this policy, they are referred to as everyone engaged with the Red Cross. The policy also applies to the international collaborations the Swedish Red Cross has with other National Societies and other parts of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The Swedish Red Cross shall ensure that all parties are informed of the existence of this policy and its consequences.

## **POLICY COMMITMENTS**

1. The Swedish Red Cross will work to ensure that a health perspective is integrated into the organisation's humanitarian activities, nationally and internationally.
2. The Swedish Red Cross shall prioritise community-based health work based on the needs and capacities of the local community and have a special focus on health promotion and disease prevention activities to empower participants.
3. The Swedish Red Cross, in its supporting and complementary roles, shall advocate with responsible authorities, and other actors so that the health care system meets the health needs of people at increased vulnerability risk.
4. The Swedish Red Cross shall, based on our values, support and complement the health care system and ensure that its health activities comply with national law and regulations.

5. The Swedish Red Cross shall, in accordance with its statutes and based on identified needs, carry out health promotion, disease prevention and case activities. These include, but are not limited to:
  - a. first aid and psychological first aid, psychosocial support, activities that break isolation, build social cohesion and strengthen social networks and support functions of individuals and local communities, health and hygiene education and support activities that strengthen resilience and recovery of people at increased risk of vulnerability, including volunteers and employees.
  - b. Care for undocumented migrants and other migrants who fall outside of the community safety net, and treatment services for the war-wounded and tortured.

## **BACKGROUND**

In general, public health has improved both in the world and in Sweden. People are living longer and fewer people are suffering from diseases. At the same time, health inequalities are widening both in Sweden and the rest of the world, where health developments have been worst for people living in socio-economic deprivation. Differences in health between people from different backgrounds are both unfair and a problem for the socially sustainable development of society. It is therefore of importance to promote both good and equal health. An individual's health is influenced by a variety of factors, interacting or on its own. These are called health determinants and consists not only for the individual's biological condition, normal life processes such as ageing or personal lifestyle choices, but also of structural factors such as poverty, inequality, widening social gaps, lack of respect for human rights, discrimination of various kinds, environmental impacts etc. For long-term and sustainable health work, modifiable factors at all levels should be addressed.

The health promotion activities of the Swedish Red Cross should be seen as a support and complement to the state's responsibility, but it should not take over the state's responsibility in this area.

The Swedish Red Cross health policy is based on the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) "Health Policy" from 2005 and updates and contextualises its content for the Swedish Red Cross. This policy is complemented by relevant strategies, including the Federation's Strategy 2020 and the Swedish Red Cross' strategic direction 2023.

## **APPLICATION OF THE POLICY**

The overall responsibility for ensuring that the organisation complies with the policy lies with the Governing Board and management team of the Swedish Red Cross. The branch boards and regional councils are responsible for ensuring that activities at a local level are carried out in line with the policy. The respective operational manager is responsible for ensuring that relevant procedures and follow-up are in place to ensure compliance with the policy.

Everyone involved with the Red Cross have a personal responsibility to act themselves in accordance with this policy. This policy should be used internally within the organisation and to support dialogue with target groups, authorities, and other stakeholders.

## **DEFINITIONS**

- Health – The Swedish Red Cross view of health is based on the definition of the World Health Organisation (WHO), where health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The WHO also defines health as not only an end, but as a resource in everyday life – to cope with the demands of everyday life, but also to do what you want in life.
- Health promotion – is defined as efforts to enhance and maintain people’s perceived physical, mental and social well-being by empowering people to participate and trust in their abilities. The focus is on healthy and protective factors that contribute to health.
- Preventive health – is defined as efforts to prevent disease and injury, and physical, mental or social problems. The focus is on risk factors that contribute to health-
- Health care – is defined as actions to medically prevent, investigate, and treat diseases and injuries. The focus is on already known health problems.
- Community Based Health and First Aid – is a community-based approach and tool where stakeholders in the community identify and prioritise their health needs together and propose their own solutions to strengthen and improve conditions in the community.