

## Public health in Austria: a snapshot

Thomas Ernst Dorner

Published online: 16 April 2014  
© Springer-Verlag Wien 2014

Public health is the science of preventing disease, prolonging life, and promoting health in the community. This mission demands a multidisciplinary and interprofessional approach in research, education, and finally the application of education and research: evidence-based decision making. Scientific disciplines involved in public health include health sciences, epidemiology, health care research, health economy, and health policy research. In the Austrian Public Health Association, all these disciplines are represented, and the members with various professional backgrounds scientifically strive to achieve the common vision to contribute toward healthier individuals and a healthier society.

Public health in Austria is increasingly gaining significance, through a growing public health work force, a growing number of public health education facilities, and a growing public health awareness among decision makers. The society is posed to various new public health challenges as society is also changing. The pending questions in the society that demand public health answers include issues like equal distributions of health resources (material and immaterial), health threats due to changing societal, ecological, economic, and built environment, or problems associated with the demographic change and the aging community.

This special edition “Public health” in *WMW* aims to give a snapshot of current and accomplished public health activities in Austria. The first three articles deal with the main pillars of public health: research, education, and health promotion as an example for public health application. Schwarz and Maier analyze in their article fields of public health research in Austria, pub-

lished in international scientific journals. So, the article gives an impression about public health research in Austria that is visible from an international point of view. Diem and Dorner review and describe the offer of public health studies and courses in Austrian universities and universities of applied sciences. Burkert et al. illustrate good practice models for mental health promotion in Austria. Opinions and attitudes of medical students toward prevention are presented by Borsoi et al. in their article. This paper is followed by two health care research articles. Hoffmann et al. reveal that there are major differences in health care access points in the different Austrian federal states and that these differences are not only caused by personal characteristics of individuals but also by structural characteristics of the respective health care systems. Finally, Stamm et al. concentrate on the health care utilization of aged people in Austria with and without musculoskeletal diseases and show that the excess health care utilization in elderly people with musculoskeletal diseases is partly mediated by deficits in activities of daily living, pain intensity, and anxiety or depression.

The manuscripts in this special edition show that public health research in Austria has achieved a certain level. The papers, however, also reveal potential fields for improvement. So, health care research in Austria is mainly based on, e.g., self-reported data from population surveys, and often deals with surrogate parameters, only. Although these datasets are sound, the conclusions that can be drawn from it are limited. In principle, hard facts from the health care systems exist in Austria, but they are only very restrictedly available for health care research, and it is definitely not possible to merge the various Austrian datasets. The Austrian Public Health Association claims, therefore, to lay the (legal) foundations to make those data available for research, anonymized and under strict compliance with protection of data privacy.

Finally, I would like to thank the authors and reviewers who made this special edition possible. Furthermore,

---

Ass.-Prof. Priv.-Doz. Dr. T. E. Dorner, MPH (✉)  
Institute for Social Medicine, Centre for Public Health,  
Medical University Vienna, Kinderspitalgasse 15,  
1090 Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: thomas.dorner@meduniwien.ac.at

I would like to thank the editors of *WMW*, Peter Mikosch and Peter Pietschmann, for their kind invitation to moderate this special edition. I hope that the papers in this edition will account for discussions, argumentations, and scientific disputations in the Austrian public health community, and contribute to the development of public health in Austria, facilitate evidence-based public health

decisions, and ultimately contribute toward healthier individuals and a healthier society.

**Conflict of interest**

The author declares no conflict of interest.