

Setting up a behavioural insights unit - WHO launches a set of considerations to support countries



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WHO/Europe has launched a new document, providing support to countries that wish to set up a unit for behavioural insights (BI) in health. The document provides guidance on key considerations, ranging from the location of a unit and staffing, to ensuring impact and sustainability.

The document was developed based on extensive consultation with experts who have set up BI units in different contexts, as well as discussions with the Technical Advisory Group on Behavioural Insights and Sciences for Health at WHO headquarters.

Jonas Sivelä, Head of the Cultural, Behavioural and Media Insights Centre (CUBE) of the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, praised the guidance document: “The new WHO/Europe document has been useful for me in thinking about the opportunities and challenges related to setting up a cross-cutting unit to bring a deeper understanding of culture and behaviour into health policy and service design”.

BI has contributed to tackling complex health issues such as obesity, tobacco control and vaccine acceptance through interventions that are:

Furthermore, BI has been used to complement medical and epidemiological sciences in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Drawing on this positive experience, health authorities in at least 5 countries across the WHO European Region have already set up dedicated BI units and many others are considering how to take a structured approach to BI work in their national contexts.

The document provides concrete actions for each of the 8 considerations, from gaining leadership buy-in to drafting a strategy for the unit.

While the exact steps will vary across countries and organizations, the document helps ensure that key areas are considered and provides case examples to illustrate the range of topics and methods that such units can cover.

The Behavioural and Cultural Insights (BCI) Unit at WHO/Europe is a flagship initiative of the European Programme of Work 2020–2025, “United Action for Better Health”, established in 2020 to lead efforts, advance evidence and provide technical guidance to countries in this field. The Unit has been engaging extensively with countries and partners in the Region to develop a shared vision, targets and commitments on BCI for health. As a result, a resolution on BCI for health is being presented for adoption by Member States of the European Region in September 2022.

The BCI Unit offers a range of tools and support to countries interested in setting up dedicated BI units or teams. It can also provide peer-to-peer support and help to connect interested countries with others who are already further along the path of implementing BI. For more information, please contact: euinsights@who.int

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