

Berlin: Committed to Successful Strategies for Metropolitan Health Care

Background

Being the world's first capital city to join the Global Compact gives Berlin the opportunity to highlight its constructive role in shaping a social, ecologically responsible, and just framework for urban development. In particular, Berlin wants to use its membership to promote implementation of the Global Compact Principles in urban politics to its 17 partner cities on all continents.

Accordingly, Berlin has announced its readiness to participate in the UN Global Compact Cities Programme (Cities Programme).

Berlin's commitment to the UN Global Compact Cities Programme

Taking part in the Cities Programme offers member cities the opportunity to learn from other local contexts and to work closely with companies and other figures in civil society on solving urban problems. In addition, they receive access to the global network and have direct contact with the UN system.

The Global Compact represents both an opportunity and a challenge for Berlin. After Berlin's formal accession at the end of 2005, stakeholders from the state government and from state-owned companies were invited to a first informational event to hear about the origins and the practical relevance of membership in the Global Compact. Some of the participating companies expressed their willingness to cooperate within the framework of public-private partnerships. Others, such as Berlin-Brandenburg International Airport, have opted for their own membership in the Global Compact.

Focus on Urban Medicine

In its contributions to the Global Compact Cities Programme, Berlin will initially be concentrating on the issue of "urban medicine". Large numbers of people of different origins living in close quarters in a restricted geographical area pose particular challenges for medical care. Urban medicine deals with patterns of disease that are found more often in major metropolitan areas than elsewhere. HIV/AIDS, other infectious diseases, psychiatric illnesses, the specific health needs of immigrant residents and of children and teenagers all require special treatment options. Demographic change in urban populations is also an issue for urban medicine, while the contamination of drinking water supplies with antibiotics is one example of how the health care sector needs to interact with other areas of life in major cities.

In connection with Berlin's involvement in the Global Compact Cities Programme, the Berlin Senate joined the health care providers Vivantes and Charité in holding a conference at the Berlin Town Hall in September 2007 on the subject of urban medicine.

The experience acquired by Berlin and other international metropolises in urban health care – especially in the area of health care for immigrants, epidemiology, and the medical impact of environmental pollution – was made available to interested partner cities as the basis for an exchange of information. By helping to identify and establish best-practice models in the area of sustainable public health care, disease prevention, and aftercare, the cosmopolitan city of Berlin also hopes to contribute to creating a socially engaged and responsible framework for urban development.

Active Health Project – Improving immigrants' access to health care

"Active Health – Strategies to improve immigrants' access to health care by promoting awareness and empowerment" is a continuation of Berlin's commitment to the Cities Programme. This project is being realized under the overall supervision of BGZ Berliner Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (Berlin International Cooperation Agency), an agency funded by the federal state of Berlin and the Berlin Chamber of Skilled Trades in cooperation with Berlin's Senate Department (ministry) for Health, the Environment and Consumer Protection and the organization Gesundheit Berlin e.V. It was funded during the pilot phase by the European Commission as part of the "Community Action Program to Combat Social Exclusion (2002-2006)".

“Active Health” addresses two core issues of “metropolitan health” at the same time – specific health problems experienced by immigrants and the health care policy challenges triggered by demographic change in metropolitan areas – and is geared towards the Global Compact’s Principles 1 and 6: “supporting and respecting human rights within one’s own sphere of influence” and “eliminating discrimination in hiring and employment”.

“Active Health” is aimed at increasing immigrant involvement in shaping the health care system and at promoting awareness of interculturalism among stakeholders in politics, the administration, business, education, civil society, and immigrant organizations themselves. It is a fact that immigrants in particular still experience significant social disadvantage when it comes to health care access. The “empowerment” aspect of the project is based on the insight that immigrants’ access to the health care system is best when they themselves are part of the system. As a result, “Active Health” aims to attract immigrants to the health professions and, in the medium term, to increase the percentage of immigrants working in the health care sector. There are already a number of concepts and good-practice examples of interculturalism in this sector, and this expertise must be taken advantage of.

Active Health – Key Activities

BGZ carried out many different pilot activities last year aimed at getting stakeholders on board including network meetings, roundtable discussions, and specialist meetings to seminars for opinion leaders, workshops, and conferences and even media campaigns.

The “Active Health” network supports these activities as a platform for strategy development, exchanges on good-practice examples, and assistance with getting new services included in regular public services. From the outset, one fundamental aspect was the active involvement of immigrants’ organizations, which have concentrated experience of specific cultures, ways of life, and the various options for access to Berlin’s diverse cultural communities.

The heart of “Active Health”, however, is and remains the work with immigrants themselves – especially with young people facing the challenge of choosing a profession. BGZ and Gesundheit Berlin are helping them with this choice by supplying extensive informational materials on the health professions and on access to these (posters, flyers, Web site). The volunteer “career advisor” campaign started in September 2007. These volunteers are health professionals who have a migration background themselves. They go into schools, youth centres, and family centres to talk to young people about job prospects, to introduce them to various professions, and to answer questions. This volunteer “career advisor” model has proven to be an excellent way of arousing interest in professions with which immigrants tended to be unfamiliar.

The strategic advisory board monitoring the “Active Health” project has summarized its conclusions in its “Policy Recommendations on Interculturalism in the Health Care Sector”.

Active Health – Next Steps

The activities initiated by “Active Health” will be continued in 2008, despite the fact that funding from the European Commission has come to an end. BGZ and Gesundheit Berlin will be concentrating in this regard on the work being done with the volunteer “career advisors” and on maintaining the stakeholders’ network. Negotiations with the federal state of Berlin on long-term financial support for the project are underway. More information on “Active Health” is available at www.activehealth.gesundheitberlin.de (for stakeholders), www.gesunde-perspektive.de (for young people), and www.bgz-berlin.de.

With these and other projects, institutions in Berlin will continue to bring in intriguing new aspects as we build on the “urban medicine” focus over the next few years.