

## The Concept of Health

Training Theme	Training material and literature
<p>Basic health knowledge</p> <p>- Definitions of health and various understandings of health</p>	<p>Short description of various understandings of health. Used as background paper in constructing WP6 : the European frame for training programme.</p> <p>Litterature:</p> <p><b>Aaron Antonovsky (1987):</b> <i>Unraveling The Mystery of Health - How People Manage Stress and Stay Well</i>, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers</p> <p><b>Jensen B.B (2003):</b> <i>Handlekompetence, sundhedsbegreber og sundhedsviden. I Hounsgaard , L (red) læring i sundhedsvæsnet. København: Munksgaard</i></p> <p><b>Wackerhausen, Steen (1994):</b> <i>Et åbent sundhedsbegreb – mellem fundamentalisme og relativisme I:</i>  <i>Jensen, Uffe og Andersen, Peter Fuur (red.): Sundhedsbegreber, filosofi og praksis, Forlaget Philosophia, Århus</i></p>

**The concept of health:** Back in 1948 the World Health Organisation, WHO, defined health as: A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (WHO, 1948).

This definition is generally acknowledged, and has been used for many years in the international field of health promotion. This definition has been criticized for being too ambitious, but it also includes a focus on health as a positive and a broad concept comprising well-being and the quality of life as well as the absence of disease.

Bjarne Bruun Jensen ( 2003) uses the following model to illustrate which factors affect health, and to explain the components of the broad, positive definition of health. The first two components correspond to WHO's definition of health and include the absence of illness and a sense of well-being (the positive definition of health). The third and fourth components are the factors of lifestyle and living conditions (the broader definition of health).

1 Negative definition of health  (absence of illness)	2 Positive definition of health  (sense of well-being)
3 Narrow definition of health  (life style)	4 Broad definition of health  (living conditions)

This means that we can look upon health as a human resource, a capacity – in other words, that health is more than an individual objective or state, but it is also a resource in terms of being visionary, choosing the good life and acting on this.

Wacherhausen (1994) brings a new dimension to the definition of health, focusing on the capacity of individuals to act relative to their culture:

"Health is the ability to realise goals, and what determines a person's degree of health - the quality of his general capacity for action - is the balance between the person's goals, his conditions of life and his subject-determined capacity for action."

Aaron Antonovsky draws in contributions to a broader understanding of the concept of health. His research has led to the concept of Salutogenetics, which focuses on the learning processes of real life. A sense of Coherence is essential in these learning processes and is defined as:

"a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that (1) the stimuli deriving from one's internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable and explicable; (2) the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli; and (3) these demands are challenges, worthy of investment and engagement."  
(Antonovsky, 1987)