

Has the Spirit of Our Legislation Been Forgotten?

When discussing health and wellbeing, or perhaps more accurately the challenges related to them, it often seems that the underlying spirit of our national legislation has been overlooked.

From the Finnish Constitution onwards, the guiding principle of legislation related to human and environmental wellbeing is clear: society should first and foremost promote positive development and prevent avoidable diseases and problems from arising. At the same time, we must be prepared to address illnesses and social challenges that have already emerged. The primary intention of our legislation is therefore not to accept problems as inevitable nor to prioritise corrective services over preventive action.

For example, the Constitution requires public authorities to promote the health of the population. The Local Government Act states that municipalities are responsible for promoting the wellbeing of their residents, while legislation governing municipal cultural activities also highlights the promotion of health and wellbeing as a key objective. The Youth Act emphasises sustainable development, healthy lifestyles, and respect for both life and the environment. The Rescue Act places responsibility on individuals, businesses and communities to prevent fires and other accidents. Land-use planning and environmental legislation seek to ensure safe and healthy living environments for all population groups.

The same principle is reflected in the Health Care Act and the Act on Organising Health and Social Services. Their stated objectives include promoting and maintaining health, wellbeing, work ability, functional capacity and social security, while reducing inequalities in health between population groups. Promoting and maintaining the wellbeing and health of the population is explicitly identified as a primary goal.

Our legislation places particular emphasis on the responsibility of public authorities, while also recognising the important role of businesses, organizations and communities in creating conditions that support health and wellbeing. It encourages action to prevent harm, disease, exclusion and other risks to wellbeing. Importantly, the legislation acknowledges that health, wellbeing, work ability and functional capacity are built primarily in everyday life, not within health and social care services alone.

I would like to believe that South Savo shares a common ambition to develop society in line with the true spirit of this legislation. Hopefully, this perspective will also be reflected in the next national government programme negotiations. To improve health and wellbeing, we do not need dozens of separate and disconnected programmes or projects. Instead, we need stronger and more consistent support for regional and local action so that the intentions of the legislation can be translated into practice.

My intention is not to underestimate the importance of healthcare services. On the contrary, I want to highlight an opportunity that is too often overlooked. By strengthening health and wellbeing through proactive and preventive action, we can also improve access to care for acute conditions and diseases that are difficult to prevent. When fewer people require treatment and long-term care, resources become available for those who need them most. The human and economic potential of proactive and preventive action is enormous.

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