



FIRST BARENTS HEALTH MINISTERS' MEETING

Oslo 12 November 2019

JOINT STATEMENT

The first health ministers' meeting under the Barents collaboration took place in Oslo, Norway on 12 November 2019. The meeting was hosted by Minister of Health of Norway and attended by ministers and high level representatives from Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden (hereafter; the ministers and high level representatives), the Barents member regions in Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden, and collaborating organisations.

The ministers and high level representatives noted that, due to the increased travel across the borders, and a more integrated labour market, during the 26 years since the signing of the Kirkenes declaration, and the 17 years since the foundation of the Joint Working Group on Health and Social Issues (JWGHS) in 2002, the health collaboration has steadily increased in significance and is now regarded as a vital part of the Barents collaboration.

The ministers and high level representatives recognised the benefits of the participation of both the national/federal and regional level health authorities in the JWGHS, reflecting the two-level structure of the Barents cooperation. The collaboration also includes experts and medical personnel all over the Barents Region and facilitates professional contacts on regional and national level.

The ministers and high level representatives commended the JWGHS for developing *The 6th Framework Programme for Cooperation on Health and Related Social Issues in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region 2020-2023* with the expert programmes *The Barents HIV/TB Programme*, and the *Barents Programme for New Technology and Methods for Health Care in Sparsely Populated Areas*, that provide the framework for collaboration and joint activities, and a common ground for exchange of knowledge and experience. They further thanked Sweden for funding the needs assessment for the collaboration on children and youth at risk in the Barents Region, that can serve as a starting point for an additional expert programme on *children and youth at risk in the Barents Region*.

The ministers and high level representatives noted that all the Barents countries are members of the World Health Organization (WHO) and that the collaboration in the Barents Region is in line with WHO recommendations, and of the priorities of the partner countries. They recognised the added value of the JWGHS as a joint forum for regional cooperation in health

and related social issues based on these recommendations and priorities for the benefit of the population in the Barents Region.

The ministers and high level representatives further discussed the development and future direction of the Barents collaboration in health and related social issues along the main priority lines of the 6th Framework programme:

- Collaboration on prevention of communicable diseases (HIV and tuberculosis) in the Barents Region
- Collaboration on prevention and control of non-communicable diseases in the Barents Region
- Collaboration on improvement of the situation for children and youth at risk in the Barents Region
- Collaboration on new technologies and working methods for health care in sparsely populated areas in the Barents Region

The ministers and high level representatives welcomed the decision of the Norwegian chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) to make health a main priority for the next programme period. The ministers and high level representatives welcomed the decision of the Region of Västerbotten's chairmanship of the Barents Regional Council (BRC) to continue youth as a priority and telemedicine a thematic area for the next period.

The ministers and high level representatives thanked the outgoing chairmanship of the JWGHS, Norway and the Republic of Komi, and welcomed the new chairmanship, Sweden and the Republic of Karelia who will hold the position for the period 2020-2021.