

Municipal health conferences in the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg, Germany – ready for initiating and steering primary health care provisions at community level?

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BACKGROUND:

- According to the Ottawa Charter of the World Health Organization „is Health created and lived by people within the settings of their everyday life; where they learn, work, play, and love.“
- In this way, they attributed a central importance for human health to the „living worlds“, such as municipalities, districts or cities.
- Since health care – as an elementary component of the community – ranks high in the value of citizens, states and municipalities there fore exercise particular control and supervisory functions in the sense of public welfare provisions.
- In order to identify the future regional and local challenges in the health sector, in the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg at an early stage and to proactively control them, municipal health conferences were introduced in 2013 by the state government.
- In 2015, these became compulsory for all counties and municipalities and should take place at least once a year, usually under the direction of the district administration.
- Assessing the current municipal health conferences objectively shows, that only a few well-functioning and working conferences can be identified. Key questions remain: What are the factors that promote and inhibit the establishment? And how can results be measured?

METHOD:

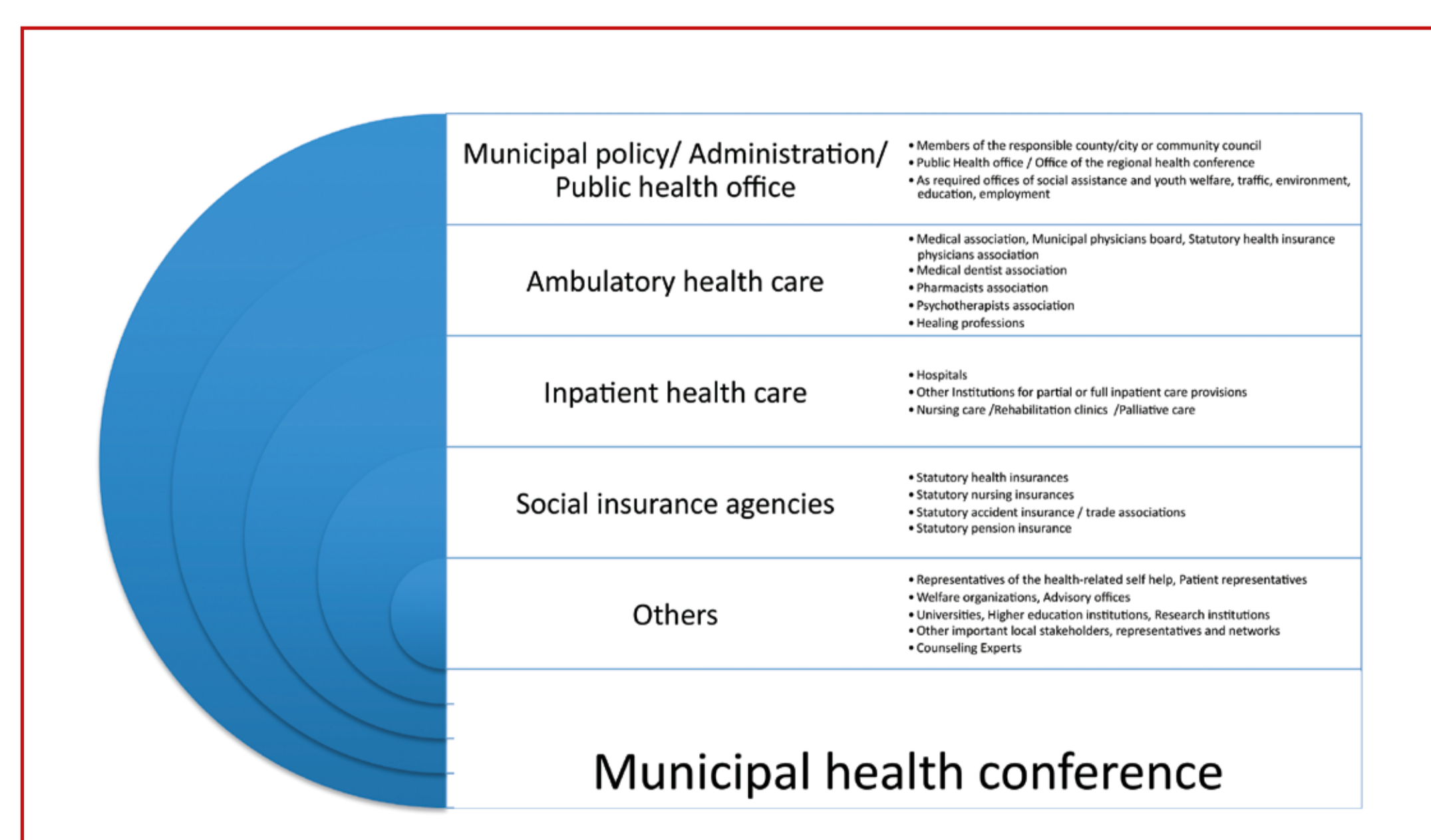
- The 37 counties / urban areas were examined with regard to their implementation and realization status.
- In the process, the implementation processes have been analyzed and problem areas were identified through, interviews and through participation as guests.
- Internet searches
 - Websites of county administration, health offices, health conferences
 - Universities in Baden-Wuerttemberg
 - Regional / local newspapers
 - Free search („grey literature“)
- Interviews (12 interviews)
- Participatory observation at the municipal health conferences and the state health conference

RESULTS:

LEGAL DEFINITION OF MUNICIPAL HEALTH CONFERENCES IN BADEN-WUERTEMBERG

- Municipal Health Conferences are:
 - Steering committees that advise on needs-based, municipal analyses and recommendations for health and decide on their implementation (Figure 1).
 - Processes in which the relevant actors jointly negotiate communal strengths and weaknesses, identify municipal needs and seek for solutions.”

Figure 1: Typical stakeholders and players in a Municipal health conference



CHALLENGES IN MUNICIPAL HEALTH MANAGEMENT

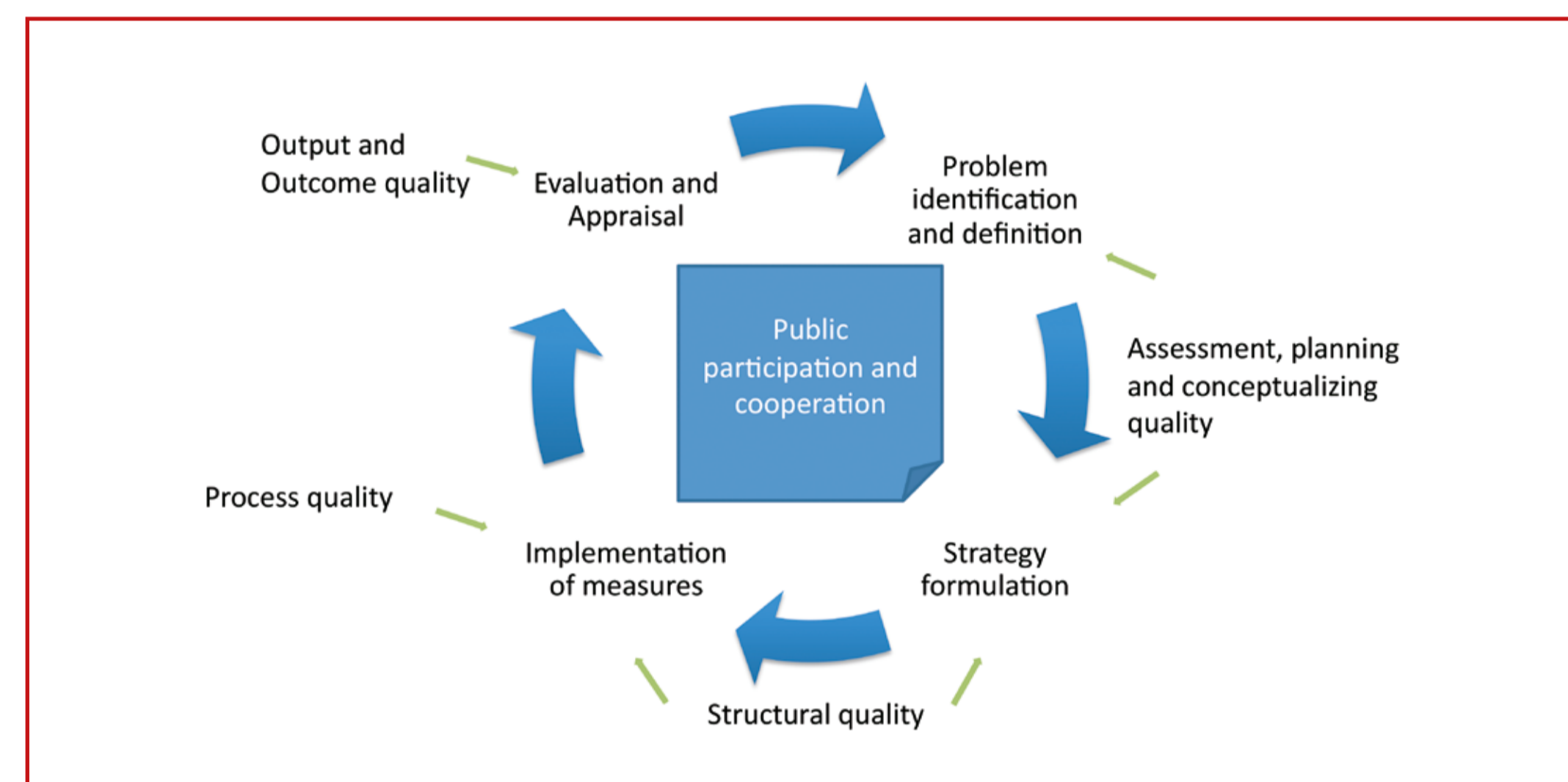
- Population-related health problems are often so complex that they can only be solved by the interaction of many actors.
- Targeted cross-sectoral cooperation also requires appropriate communication and coordination structures on the ground.
- Since regional health care has grown differently, regional specifics in planning systems must be better taken into account.
- The health conditions in the regional population are also different.

- The influence of municipal self-administration on health care is very limited due to competences, regulatory competencies and self-administration.
- The „Health in all Policies approach“ of the WHO is indicated as determinants of health are mostly from outside of health care.

ACTION CYCLE OF MUNICIPAL HEALTH CONFERENCES

- Municipal health conferences usually work based on recommended principles and instruments.
- The core instrument is the Public Health Action Cycle which should give the conference a smooth cyclic execution of different actions (Figure 2).
- However, the process needs expert guidance at any step and particular instruments and quality measures in order to be successful. This often is lacking on Municipal level.
- In order to assist the Municipal health conferences to get into a working process, the State Public Health office together with the State health conference has defined five action fields – Occupational Health Management; Medical care supply; Healthy Aging; Growing Healthy; Diabetes Prevention. Further other topics have been set to agenda by individual conferences according to their problem identification.

Figure 2: Public Health Action Cycle

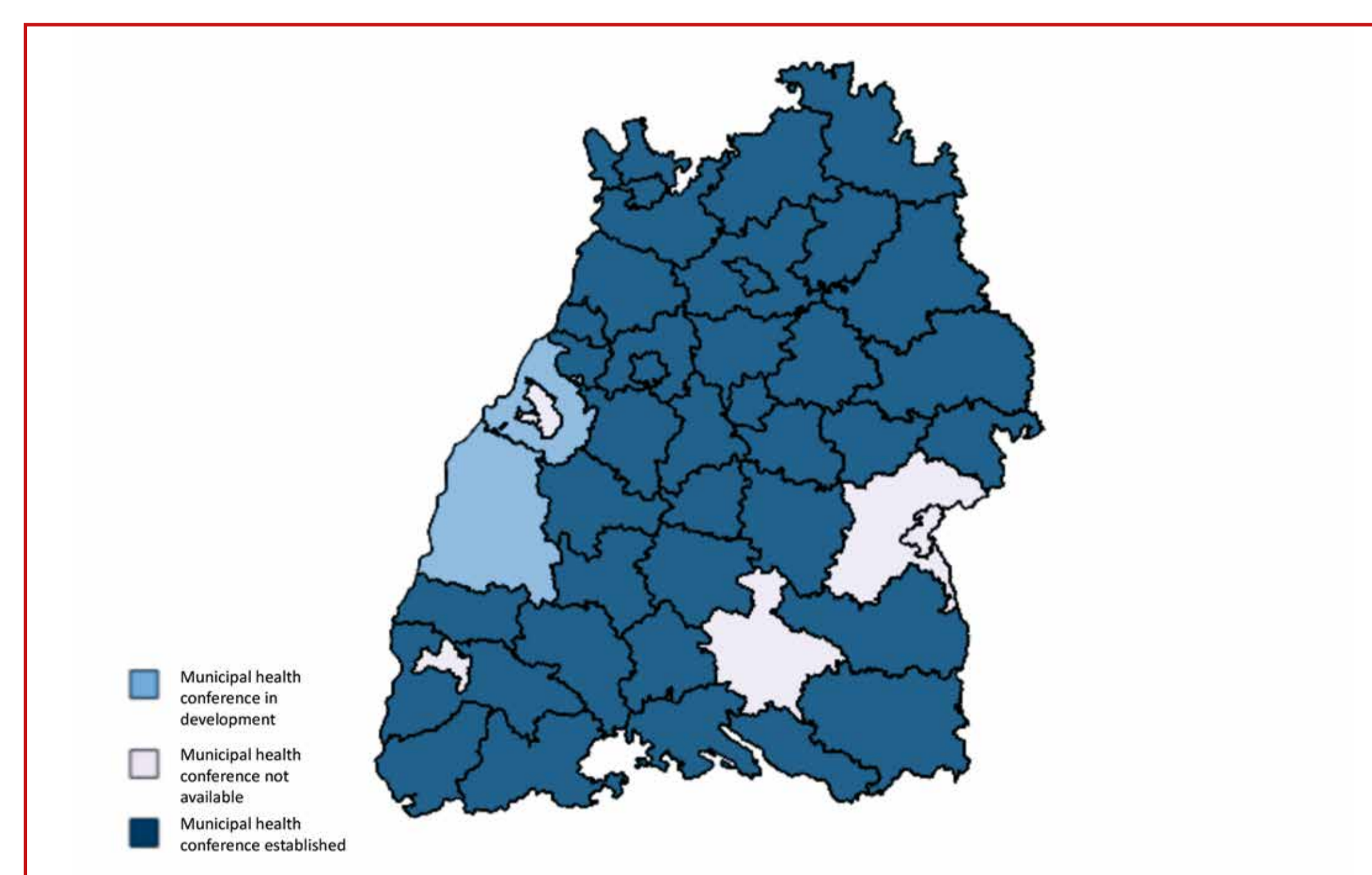


Source: Own representation based on Rosenbrock 1995

DEGREE OF IMPLEMENTATION ON MUNICIPAL LEVEL

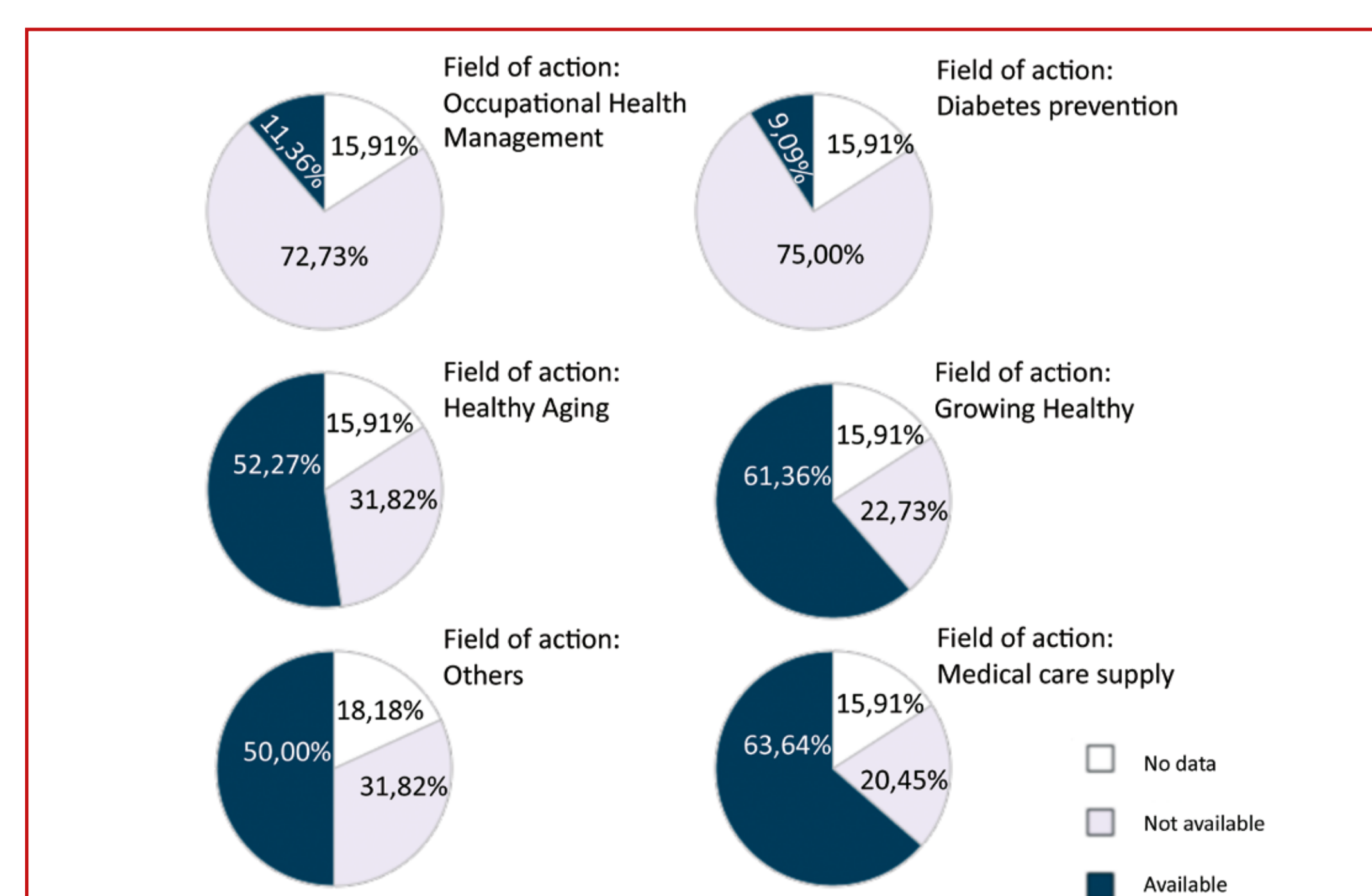
- Overall Baden-Wuerttemberg consist of 37 Counties which since 2015 are obliged to establish a health conference.
- The degree to which this has been actually implemented differs but for the majority (84,09 %) of counties this has succeeded, 4,55 % are in development and 11,36 % do not yet have a conference established (see Figure 3)
- In terms of implementation of the field of actions the degree differs much more. A summary of the degree of implementations is provided in Figure 4.

Figure 3: Mapped Overview on status quo of implementation of Municipal Health Conferences in Baden-Wuerttemberg



Source: Own representation based <http://www.gesundheitsatlas-bw.de>

Figure 4: Status quo of implementation of field of actions on Municipal Health Conference level



Source: Own representation based <http://www.gesundheitsatlas-bw.de>

REMAINING CHALLENGES

- The diversity of the different structures of the state council offices in Baden-Wuerttemberg is also reflected in the introduction and implementation of health conferences.
- On the one hand, there are only a few lighthouse projects in which health conferences are seen and used as an active designer of community health care and which have set goals to achieve sustainable outcomes.
- The overwhelming part of the municipal health conferences shows rather hesitant activities. If any, their activities show a rhythm of one to two annual plenary sessions and interim working groups for a more detailed discussion of topics.
- As conducive has been shown that for topics which are subject to intense debate the municipal health conferences can balance those differently due to the neutral role. Further, the greater the local need, the better it can be identified and issued by the municipal health conferences. The benefit of the own local activities is tangible for the public and promotional for the value of the health market and public health services.
- Potential barriers are seen in the lacking clear mandate and the very limited resources and specialised expertise. So far there has been a lack of systematic evaluations of the results of health conferences and a combination of practical experience from the different regions and development phases.

NEED FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Structured health conferences provide an opportunity to exercise greater responsibility for health care planning and to expand the scope for action, especially in municipal health management.
- Structural introductory errors can be identified as inhibiting factors. The following prerequisites may be identified as promoting factors for the development of the effectiveness of health conferences:
 - More resources for quality development
 - Clear political mandate
 - Human resources
 - Financial resources
 - Capacity development
 - Co-operation partners and networks
 -> A clear need for excellent expert capacities and committed skills to control the committee and its subgroups
 - Better consideration of perceived barriers and specification or self-elaboration of clear guidelines for action -> Capacity development not „stiff“ instruments
 - Definition of achievable and measurable target values, as well as systematic evaluation of the results and outcomes
 - Orientation to local needs
 - Sufficient data base
 - Implement recommendations for action by the Municipal health conferences as central results
 - The importance of health as a location factor strengthens Municipal health conferences care process (Table 3).

CONCLUSIONS:

- On the whole, health conferences as a driver and designer of regional health care, which is to actively advise and decide on a future-oriented, needs-based health care provisions, remain behind its possibilities.
- Clear guidelines for action and best-practice examples are encouraging processes in which the relevant stakeholders jointly identify municipal needs, negotiate municipal strengths and weaknesses, and look for new care solutions.
- The actual possibilities can be found in already well functioning health conferences, which unfortunately are so far still not in the majority.
- At the same time policy processes indicate that legislative changes will lead to a transfer of power to initiate primary health care provisions at community level to municipally authorities.
- Therefore, municipally should strengthen activities in order to be prepared for future tasks and responsibilities.

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