

APPROVED
by Resolution No. SPN-
of 22 June 2021 of
the Senate of Vilnius University

VILNIUS UNIVERSITY HEALTH PROMOTION AND SPORT CONCEPT

#HEALTHYUNIVERSITY

The Vilnius University Health Promotion and Sport Concept #HealthyUniversity (hereinafter ‘Concept’) is based on the current situational analysis of physical and mental health and outlines the most important guidelines to be sought in promoting health and developing sport at Vilnius University (hereinafter ‘University’). With the aim to implement the Concept, a plan for promoting physical and mental health under the University Health Promotion and Sports Concept #HealthyUniversity shall be developed and approved by the Senate of Vilnius University for the period of validity of each strategic, operational plan of the University. The objectives of the plan, which is adopted in conjunction with this Concept, shall be directed towards members of the University community, the University as an institution, and society. The objectives of the Concept will be reflected in the operational plans of the University units involved.

The Concept has been developed based on the following documents: the Statute of Vilnius University, Declaration of Alma Ata on Primary Health Care (1978), World Health Organization (WHO) Global Strategy for Health for All by 2000 (1981), Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (1986), Okanagan Charter (2016), Tartu Call for Healthy Lifestyle 2019, UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Goals 3 and 4) (2015), Lithuanian Health Strategy 2014-2025 approved by Resolution of the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania No. XII-964 of 26 June 2014, Lithuania’s Progress Strategy ‘Lithuania 2030’ approved by Resolution of the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania No. XI-2015 of 15 May 2012, the latest (25/11/2020) WHO guidelines on physical activity, the Republic of Lithuania Law on Sport, the agreement signed by nine Lithuanian universities on 6 March 2019 “On the Implementation of Health Preserving and Promoting Policies”, the Agreement of 31 March 2021 “On Enhancing Mental Health in Lithuanian Establishments of Higher Schools” (signed by the Lithuanian University Rectors’ Conference, Lithuanian College Principals’ Conference, Lithuanian Student Union, and Vilnius University Students’ Representation), Health Education and Physical Activity Promotion Concept approved by Resolution of the Senate of Vilnius University No. SK-2012-7-7 of 27 February 2012, Vilnius University Diversity and Equal Opportunities Strategy 2020-2025, and Vilnius University Strategic Plan 2021-2025.

Definitions used in the Concept:

High-performance sport is a form of individual physical activity subject to prescribed rules. It involves competing against other persons (individually or in a team) by taking part in high-performance sports competitions (if necessary, involving animals and/or technical tools) with the aim to defeat competitors and improve one's physical and mental qualities and skills, including activities aimed at improving physical and mental qualities and skills of an individual to prepare for high-performance sports competitions adequately.

Physical activity is an individual's physical actions aimed at strengthening health, improving physical and mental qualities and skills without the aim of preparing for and/or participating in high-performance sports competitions, including activities aimed at educating society on sports, physical activity, and health promotion issues.

Physical literacy is a physical ability, motivation, confidence, knowledge, and understanding in evaluating and assuming the responsibility to maintain physical activity throughout their life (Whitehead, 2016).

Mental health is a state of well-being of an individual that enables them to realise their potential, overcome the challenges of daily life, to be productive at work and contribute to their community's aspirations, making it an integral part of health that is not limited to the mere absence of disease or disorders (WHO, 2018).

Mental health literacy is understanding how to achieve and maintain good mental health; understanding what mental health disorders are and how they are treated; reducing the stigma associated with mental health disorders; and enhancing opportunities to seek help (Kutcher, Wei, & Coniglio, 2016).

Mental health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over, and improve, their mental health (WHO, 2018).

Sport means all forms of an individual's physical activity aimed at developing and improving their physical and mental qualities and skills or promoting health. In this Concept, the term 'sport' also covers high-performance sport.

A healthy and safe environment is a health-friendly physical, social, emotional, and psychological environment.

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (WHO, 1948).

Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over and improve their health (Ottawa Charter, 1986).

Health literacy is an individual's capacity to search for and make sense of basic health information received through various channels (Nutbeam, 2000).

Situational analysis of physical and mental health

Higher education plays an important role in the development of the individual, community, society or culture since knowledge and learning are the key driving forces in the modern context of an information society. In addition, university graduates are expected to have higher self- and environmental awareness, healthier habits and be more active citizens. In short, higher education institutions prepare individuals by providing them with education and adequate and relevant job skills and by preparing them to be active members of their communities and society (World Bank Report, 2017). For highly skilled athletes, higher education is an opportunity to combine a sports career with educational attainment (Dual Career Concept, 2012). In addition, all the members of the academic community who are engaged in sports are also offered opportunities to join volunteer club activities and/or take part in volunteering related to the promotion of sport and health and thus develop their general competencies.

Moreover, it should be noted that over 64% of individuals engaged in tertiary education are young people under 25 (Waterworth & Thorpe, 2017). They face challenges related to the transition period in their life, where they experience separation from their family because they need to move to another city or country to study and live independently (Rukauskas et al., 2020). University studies involve a considerable amount of stress; this makes it difficult to engage in academic activities, which leads to poor academic achievement and difficulties in keeping up with the learning process or staying in employment (Pascoe, Hetrick, & Parker, 2019). Stress exacerbates mental health problems such as depression, anxiety or adaptation disorders (Schönfeld et al., 2018); it increases the risk of alcohol and drug abuse, smoking and taking psychiatric drugs, and even the risk of suicide (Lesinskienė et al., 2020). Thus, the earlier perception of education as a “buffer” to protect against mental health problems has been replaced with the view that university studies are a period of increased tension and anxiety (Bulotaitė et al., 2012). The COVID-19 pandemic that broke out in the spring of 2020 caused many challenges in terms of physical (restricted mobility, weight gain, and disturbed sleep) and mental health. According to a study conducted by the researchers of Vilnius University Centre for Psychotraumatology, more than half (54.8%) of students were exposed to severe stress due to the lockdown and the consequent restriction of mobility. A similar number of students (52.4%) experienced severe stress because of the altered study process. Moreover, more than two-thirds (68.9%) of the first-year students who participated in the research indicated having faced challenges in taking care of their loved ones who experienced difficulties due to the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (VU Centre for Psychotraumatology, 2020).

The WHO data shows that 70% of the first symptoms of mental health disorders are reported by individuals under 25. Therefore, it is extremely important to ensure that young people have access to respective help as early in the process as possible. The study *Mental Health Matters* conducted in Ireland in 2016 showed that the mental health literacy of university staff and the accessibility of specialised services to meet the needs of students experiencing mental health issues enable the students to integrate into the university community smoothly, enabling them to cope with academic challenges more easily, thus ensuring both their academic achievement and better mental health (Murphy, McKernan, & Heelan, 2016). On the other hand, the established infrastructure of mental health services does not always guarantee that the most vulnerable members of the community will be taken care of. According to DiPlacito and DeRango (2016), it is of paramount importance that higher education establishments systematically develop sustainable policies aimed at promoting mental health and strive for its consistent implementation and evaluation while also taking care of the mental health of their employees.

The Counselling and Training Centre of the Faculty of Philosophy plays a key role in solving mental health issues at Vilnius University (counselling, crisis management, and training). Their services and assistance are accessible to the entire University community. In addition, scientists and lecturers from the Institute of Health Sciences and the Institute of Clinical Medicine of the Faculty of Medicine also offer respective counselling services.

Physical activity is yet another important component in health promotion; however, it has been demonstrated that universally and globally, people tend to underestimate its importance. In response, the WHO has set out to achieve 10% reduction in physical inactivity in adults and adolescents by 2025, including a 15% reduction by 2030. The results of the physical activity survey conducted in Lithuania in 2017 showed that 39% of the respondents never do sports or exercise, while 11% of those surveyed only do it on rare occasions. Similar inactivity problems are also evident in higher education. A survey of Lithuanian university students conducted in 2020 (D. Rizgelytė) showed that the majority of university students understand the importance of physical activity for their health. Nonetheless, their actual physical activity is far from matching the recommendations on health-promoting physical activity published by the WHO. Students spend too little time walking and engaging in moderately intense physical activities. It is also noteworthy that study modules promoting physical activity are almost non-existent in university study programmes. In addition, huge study workloads limit the students' abilities to engage in physical activities. Only about 10% of all students participate in the physical activities that universities offer throughout the academic year. On the other hand, research and experience show that university communities are more likely to be physically active if they are offered opportunities to engage in physical activities to their liking in a convenient location, i.e. to exercise where (or nearby the place that) they live and/or work/study. Thus, offering quality physical activity options at the place of work or

study should lead to a reduction in physical inactivity. Moreover, the accessibility of quality information and individual consultations would result in greater health literacy and motivation to be physically active.

Currently, Vilnius University students and staff are offered opportunities to do sports (individually and in groups) in the existing University sports facilities. The students who are engaged in sports represent the University at various sports events (the University has 22 sports teams). All University community members are invited to take part in interfaculty and other competitions held to promote physical activity and community building. The University's 'Health Laboratory' offers health consultations and educational activities to promote health. The University Health and Sports Centre and the Institute of Health Sciences of the Faculty of Medicine initiate and coordinate various physical activities together. Other faculties also contribute to health education (e.g. by organising the annual World Health Day, etc.). The University staff is offered opportunities to exercise in their workplace. Sports facilities are continuously and gradually upgraded. On the other hand, there is an obvious need to build a new sports centre at the Student Campus in Saulėtekis.

In view of the fact that higher education establishments are becoming probably the most important institutions in the process of systematic implementation of the overall health strategy, nine Lithuanian universities (including Vilnius University) have committed to integrating health maintenance and promotion goals in all university strategies, thus creating an environment and culture conducive to health and health promotion in all universities in Lithuania, with the aim of ensuring opportunities for community members to acquire knowledge and skills in health maintenance and promotion, including reviewing and updating the existing services, as well as creating new ones offered by universities to maintain and promote health among citizens. Therefore, the University community needs to come to an agreement on the education of community and society members that care about their own health and that of others, i.e. to agree on the principles to follow and the goals to pursue so that the defined situation is addressed at the University level, and that the #HealthyUniversity Concept becomes a subsequent output of this agreement.

#HealthyUniversity Concept means:

a **university with a living tradition** that protects and promotes the health of all members of the University community by creating a healthy, safe and personalised environment for them to work, learn, and engage in leisure activities at the University by developing sport as a form of collective communication and enabling sport on various levels, from wellness to world-class leadership;

a **centre of science-based knowledge and critical and creative thinking** operating within the framework of the holistic concept of health promotion, which, through its interdisciplinary, intersectoral, and international activities, shapes the attitudes of its community members with a view to promoting physical and mental health, including awareness of the importance of educating a healthy individual that engages in continuous development;

a **globally recognised institution that transforms Lithuania** by being committed to truth and society and by playing an important role in shaping public health policy, taking responsibility for promoting research and studies in the field of health promotion, sharing good practices, shaping a holistic approach to health and health promotion, and incentivising personal contributions to healthy lifestyles, sustainable mobility, and awareness.

To implement the Concept, the Vilnius University Physical and Mental Health Promotion Plan for 2021-2025 has been developed, enshrining the objectives defined during the situational analysis and discussions with the members of the University community. These objectives are based on the #HealthyUniversity Concept and the Vilnius University Strategic Plan for 2021-2025.

**Annex to Vilnius University
Health Promotion and Sports Concept
#HealthyUniversity**

Vilnius University Physical and Mental Health Promotion Plan

The Plan has been developed on the basis of the Vilnius University Strategic Plan for 2021-2025, approved by Resolution of the Council of Vilnius University No. TPN-3 of 24 February 2021 “On the Approval of Vilnius University Strategic Plan for 2021-2025” (hereinafter ‘Strategic Plan’), including the outcomes of discussions between members of the working group and representatives of stakeholder departments, and the situational analysis of health and sports, as well as the opportunities offered by the University. The Plan identifies the long-term goals of the Strategic Plan, the objectives set out for the University community, the University as an institution and community, and the units that will be involved in achieving the goals laid out in the Plan. The objectives of the Concept will be reflected in the action plans of the units involved.

Strategic directions under the Strategic Plan	Long-term goals	Objectives of the Concept	Units involved
Strategic direction 1 — BUILDING SOCIETY AND THE STATE	1.3. Increase influence in society and the state	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform research aimed at promoting individual and public health. Enhance the contribution of the University towards shaping society’s approach to mental and physical health. • Engage in the promotion of science and its publicity activities aimed at promoting personal and public health, including the promotion of personal initiatives in leading healthy lifestyles. Develop studies, research activities, and surveys in the field of health and health promotion. 	Faculty of Philosophy Faculty of Medicine (Institute of Health Sciences) Health and Sports Centre Cooperation with Vilnius University

			Students' Representation (hereinafter 'VU SA')
Strategic direction 2 — COOPERATION	2.1. Interdisciplinary and international research and studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate in international and national projects and/or alliances that are aimed at promoting individual and public health. Implement projects of national and international significance and engage in partnerships with private and public stakeholders, including non-governmental organisations. 	Faculty of Philosophy Faculty of Medicine (all institutes) Health and Sports Centre Cooperation with VU SA
Strategic direction 3 — SUSTAINABILITY	3.1. Motivated staff and engaged students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement personal/community initiatives to promote health among the University community with a view to increasing the diversity and accessibility of physical and mental health services to all members of the University community and increasing the number of persons using the physical and mental health promotion services offered by the University. Ensure an easily accessible variety of health-promotion services and sports activities (in-person and remote) to build healthy lifestyle and nutrition habits, personal awareness and interest in health promotion, to develop conscious adherence to habits that are based on scientific knowledge, and mental health and physical literacy, to promote mental health and physical literacy, build strong personal views on health and health promotion, take care of the employees and their well-being and, where appropriate, provide the necessary assistance. 	Faculty of Philosophy (KMC, institutes) Faculty of Medicine (Institute of Health Sciences) Health and Sports Centre Community Development Department Cultural Centre Botanical Garden Cooperation with VU SA

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable members of the University community to foster a safe emotional environment and respond to emergency situations. 	
	3.2. Infrastructure that delivers future needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapt the internal and external facilities and the infrastructure of the University to offer quality health services and sports activities, to improve the quality of physical and mental health promotion services and infrastructure offered by the University, to create an infrastructural and methodological environment enabling the University to promote the widely recognised types of sports and physical activities, and to enable the emergence of new ones. • Create incentives for ‘active sitting’ and a healthier diet. 	<p>Health and Sports Centre</p> <p>Cooperation with VU SA</p> <p>Asset Management and Service Centre</p> <p>Botanical Garden</p>