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Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

## Right to Health and Access to Health Services

The goal of the Swedish health care system as stipulated in the Health and Medical Services Act, is good health and care on equal terms for the entire population. The Act ensures universal access to health care, i.e., access for all without age limits. To facilitate access for older people, those aged 85 years or above are relieved of fees for health care. The Social Services Act states that care for older people should be aimed at ensuring that older people live a life of dignity and well-being. The Act ensures a national limit to the fees associated with care for older people.

The main responsibility of Swedish health and social care lies with the regional and local levels. This joint responsibility means that a close cooperation is necessary for providing an integrated and person-centred health care. To this end, the new Act on Integrated Documentation of Health Care and Social Services (*Lag [2022:913] om sammanhållen vård- och omsorgsdokumentation*) allows for municipalities and regions to share data. According to Swedish law, the self-determination and integrity of all patients must be respected. Patients have a right to receive the information they need to give consent to a treatment. The information must be adapted to the needs of the recipient, for example to their age.

Data on different aspects of health is regularly gathered by Swedish national agencies and other actors. For example, research council and national agency Forte finances and coordinates research on health and welfare, such as care of older people, and evaluates how the results can be put into practice. Further, the Swedish National Study on Aging and Care (SNAC) has gathered data since 2001, following a government initiative. The purpose is

to provide access to data that allows researchers to follow changes over time, and to provide a basis for long-term planning at local and national level.

With the aim of improving quality in the health care sector, The National Board of Health and Welfare publishes guidelines and recommendations used by officials in municipalities and regional councils, as well as by care providers. Further, the Swedish National Agency for Education has been given an assignment by the government to launch initiatives aimed at improving the level of Swedish language skills in the welfare system.

International human rights law is reflected in national legislation related to health and health care. National laws set the framework for regions and municipalities. On the national level, the government may provide supplementary funds to the regional and local level, ear-marked for fields where a need for development has been identified. For example, since the pandemic the government has provided additional funds to municipalities aiming to raise medical competence and improve working conditions.

According to the Discrimination Act, age is one of the prohibited grounds of discrimination in Sweden. In addition, there are six other prohibited grounds, including sex and disability. According to the Equality Ombudsman there is often an intersectional aspect to discrimination. People may file a complaint on experienced discrimination to the Equality Ombudsman who can bring an action to court on behalf of the individual. Regarding health care and social care specifically, all private individuals have the right to register a complaint to the Health and Social Care Inspectorate. Swedish law further stipulates that there must be at least one patient committee in each region or municipality. The committees are responsible for supporting and helping patients and their relatives in almost all publicly funded health care. The committee's main task is to help patients bring complaints to health care providers and ensure that complaints are answered.

The government is dedicated to ensuring that older people can participate in society in an effective and meaningful way regardless of where they live. Municipalities are responsible for ensuring that those aged 65 and over receive the support they need. For example, they can offer meeting points for older people, support for relatives, home care, short-term care and nursing homes. The government contributes with funding to municipalities to support them in their responsibilities.