

Best Practices in action: how to transfer, implement, and sustain effective health promotion interventions for children (0-12)

Module 3 - Smart Family: a Best Practice to support and empower families in promoting well-being and healthy lifestyle

Session 3.4 - Post-implementation phase of Smart family

Unit 3.4.1 - "Policy dialogue with stakeholders to support further implementation in Slovenia"

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Slide 1

Hello, I'm Martina Mutter, representing the National Institute of Public Health of Slovenia — one of the partners in the Health4EUkids initiative. Welcome to Lesson 4, where we will focus on the post-implementation phase of transferring best practices and explore how to use policy dialogue to support continued integration

Slide 2

In this presentation, I will guide you through the theoretical foundations of policy dialogue — drawing on the CHRODIS+ Guidebook and share how we applied these principles in practice to support further implementation of the Smart Family approach in Slovenia.

Slide 3 - What is a Policy Dialogue?

A policy dialogue is a structured, participatory discussion designed to inform, develop, or implement policy changes. It brings together key stakeholders from relevant sectors to focus on a specific issue or challenge. It's not just a meeting — it's a strategic tool. One that encourages active participation, fosters mutual understanding, and supports the development of practical, solution-oriented actions.

Slide 4 - The objectives of the policy dialogue

A policy dialogue can serve different purposes depending on where you are in the policy cycle and on the specific nature of your topic.

This also shapes the objectives of the dialogue, which can vary from case to case.

According to the CHRODIS+ Guidebook, common objectives include:

- Supporting the development and implementation of policies—whether at the national, regional, or local level.
- It can be used to initiate a new policy process, or to strengthen one that's already underway.
- Another key objective is to encourage cross-sectoral cooperation—bringing together stakeholders from different areas like health, education, or finance to find more integrated and sustainable solutions.
- Policy dialogues also help identify barriers and lead to practical, actionable steps to overcome them.
- They are a powerful way to build ownership and accountability among stakeholders.

- And finally, they can create the space to build mutual understanding and trust— which is essential for long-term collaboration and impact.

Slide 5 - Applying Policy Dialogue in Slovenia: The Smart Family Case

In Slovenia, our goal wasn't to create a new policy, but to explore how the Smart Family approach could be embedded into existing national healthcare programs.

The approach had already been piloted with community nurses visiting families during pregnancy and early childhood— and it was found to be both useful and relevant.

We also developed supporting materials and shared them through the national parenting website.

The policy dialogue was a natural next step— a way to bring key stakeholders together to discuss how to build on what was already working, how to ensure the approach could be sustained, integrated, and expanded— first within community nursing services, then potentially to other preventive programs, and possibly into kindergartens and schools.

Slide 6 - Key Elements of Effective Policy Dialogue

Let me now walk you through the key elements that make a policy dialogue successful.

These come into play at different stages: some in the preparation, some during the meeting, and some in the follow-up.

First: Define clear objectives and expected outcomes to keep participants focused, aligned on a shared goal, and to ensure the dialogue leads to concrete results

Second: Conduct a solid stakeholder and context analysis. To make a policy dialogue effective, it's essential to bring the right people to the table.

The CHRODIS+ Guidebook recommends keeping the group small and focused — ideally between 8 and 12 participants — to encourage active engagement and keep the conversation solution-oriented. We selected participants who could influence both policy and practice. We invited:

- A representative from the Ministry of Health, to ensure alignment with national policy priorities;
- Management-level colleagues from the National Institute of Public Health, who could provide the strategic perspective;
- Community nursing coordinators, who brought first-hand knowledge of on-the-ground implementation;
- Our Finnish partners, who added valuable international insight.
- And finally, our project team - organizing the dialogue and presenting key evaluation findings.

This brings me to the third key element, which is evidence-based preparation, Grounding the dialogue in concrete data helps build credibility and creates shared understanding, leading to informed decision-making.

Fourth element is the moderator, who plays a central role in steering the discussion - makes sure everyone's voice is heard, and help keep things focused.

In our case, that role was taken on by the National Coordinator of Community Nursing, who ensured the conversation stayed inclusive and balanced.

And finally — follow-up is key. To ensure lasting impact, it's essential to define concrete next steps, assign responsibilities, and continue stakeholder engagement beyond the meeting itself. After the dialogue, we developed a concrete action plan, which we'll continue to implement and build on in the months ahead.

Slide 7 - Dialogue Structure and Content

CHRODIS+ recommends structuring the session to be short, focused, and evidence-based, combining clear inputs with open discussion, and ending with concrete follow-up actions. Our session took place on April 9th, 2025, and it lasted about two and a half hours.

We started with opening remarks, to set the tone and confirm international support. Then, we presented the Smart Family approach— including its theoretical foundations and its origins in Finland. After that, we shared the Slovenian pilot evaluation.

The heart of the meeting was a guided discussion— where we explored opportunities, barriers, and priorities for moving forward. And finally, we wrapped up with collaborative work focused on defining concrete next steps.

Slide 8 - Outcomes of the Policy Dialogue: CHRODIS+ Framework

A well-structured policy dialogue can lead to a variety of valuable outcomes, depending on the context and goals. Some potential outcomes include:

- Triggering decisions or commitments on pre-identified topics
- Reaching consensus among stakeholders on next steps
- Identifying financing options and clear implementation pathways
- Defining mechanisms to track progress and measure success
- Strengthening ownership and long-term engagement through mutual understanding and trust
- Encouraging cross-sector alignment, transparency, and accountability
- Creating conditions that support the implementation of agreed actions.

Slide 9 - Outcomes of the Policy Dialogue: Slovenian Experience

Through our policy dialogue we aimed to build a shared understanding, align priorities, and agree on practical next steps—and in that regard, the dialogue delivered meaningful results. We reached a shared understanding that the Smart Family approach complements and strengthens existing preventive and health promotion efforts. Stakeholders agreed to begin integration within the healthcare system before expanding to other sectors like education. We will continue the work started in the pilot and expand the implementation into routine visits by community nurses for children aged two and three. We openly discussed implementation challenges - such as time constraints, nurse workloads, staff turnover, and difficulties reaching vulnerable families. These insights will be taken into account when planning the next steps. To support continued implementation of the Smart Family approach, the project team committed to developing a roadmap outlining clear next steps and a timeline. To help to put this plan into action, several potential funding sources were identified, including national and EU-level programs.

And finally, we agreed on a set of actions to support transferability and sustainability through the end of the project:

- Hosting a national webinar on Smart Family approach for healthcare professionals;
- Publishing a document on the theoretical foundation of the approach;
- And continuing to share tools and materials through the national parenting website.

Slide 10 - Lessons Learned

Reflecting on our experience, several key lessons emerged.

First: policy dialogue can be very effective even when you're not starting a new policy. It helps reinforce and expand what's already working.

Second: early and consistent stakeholder engagement really matters. It builds trust, creates ownership, and leads to more grounded discussions.

Third: having a clear structure and focusing on concrete themes keeps the dialogue on track and productive.

Fourth: mixing participants from policy and practice helps to bridge the gap between strategy and implementation.

Fifth: using local data and pilot results gives credibility to the discussion, while international input, like we had from Finland, can bring fresh insights and inspiration.

Sixth: being honest about system-level challenges allows for more realistic planning.

And finally: what happens after the dialogue is just as important as what happens during.

Without follow-up, good ideas don't turn into real change. So, having a clear action plan and ways to monitor progress is essential.

In the end, policy dialogue is not just a method— it's a tool that helps build momentum, align institutions, and support real, sustainable progress.

We hope that by sharing our experience, we can help broaden the understanding of how policy dialogue can advance health and support families.

Slide 11 - Thank you all for your participations!

Thank you for your time and attention. And I wish you all the best in your continued work.