



Independent assessments for  
better health and medical care

**SBU – SWEDISH AGENCY FOR HEALTH TECHNOLOGY  
ASSESSMENT AND ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**





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# SBU evaluates methods used by medical and social services

**SBU**, Swedish Agency for Health Technology Assessment and Assessment of Social Services, is charged with undertaking independent assessments of methods used in health, medical and dental services. SBU also evaluates methods used by social services and services provided with the support of the Law regulating Support and Service to Persons with Certain Functional Disabilities (LSS).

Questions addressed by SBU include:

- How good is a treatment or a procedure?
- How best to determine need?
- How should resources be allotted to provide the greatest possible benefit?

**SBU provides the knowledge needed to provide better health and medical care**

Society provides support for people in different ways – in the form of medical care, aged care and care of the disabled, or special care in cases of substance abuse. A child who is vulnerable or has difficulties at school can also need support from society through healthcare or social services. But what type of treatment, care or support is safest and most effective? These are the issues SBU assesses.

# Scrutinising and collating research

**RESEARCHERS STUDY** the effect of different treatments. Their results are published as articles in scientific journals. However, such huge numbers of articles are published that it is impossible for the individual professional to keep abreast of developments. SBU provides an overview by critical assessment and collation of research results on a specific topic or question.

## **Independent government authority**

SBU is a government authority, commissioned by the government to evaluate the scientific evidence supporting both new and established measures within health, medical, dental and social services. The assessments cover clinical, social, ethical and health economic perspectives.

SBU started in 1987 and is one of the oldest organisations in the world in the field of Health Technology Assessment, HTA. HTA involves systematic independent assessment of a method, including side effects, cost-effectiveness and ethical implications. Assessments can cover methods used for prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care.

## **Helping society to provide the best possible care**

SBU's assessments can serve as support for decision-makers, for those working in medical or social services and other involved parties. SBU also identifies areas where there is inadequate knowledge about the effect of different measures.



Support for personnel working  
in health and social services

# How an assessment is conducted

**SUGGESTIONS FOR TOPICS** warranting assessment, e.g. treatment methods or other procedures, are received from many sources, for example from professionals working in the health and medical services, social services, government authorities or from SBU's scientific advisory committees or board.

The main reason for undertaking an assessment is to determine whether a measure is effective. SBU also prioritises ethically controversial topics or methods which have important implications for organisations and personnel.

## **The starting point: research conducted to date**

SBU collects, evaluates and compares the results of research published to date. This means that we systematically search the

scientific literature to find the answer to one or more questions. For example, to determine which treatment is best for a certain disease, the best diagnostic method or, within social services, which supportive measures are effective. Relevant studies, i.e. those which address the question, are selected and graded according to quality.

## **Large and small projects**

Our assessments are run as projects. For every major project we recruit an interdisciplinary working group, comprising experts in the particular field. The working group helps to assess the collected scientific material. Health economic and ethical assessments are usually also undertaken.

1

### DEFINING THE QUESTION

- Formulate the question in a structured way
- Determine the selection criteria for studies to be included

2

### SELECTING THE LITERATURE

- Search the scientific literature
- Determine which articles address the question

3

### SCRUTINY OF THE STUDY

- Assess the quality of the studies

4

### GRADING THE EVIDENCE AND DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

- Collate the results of the different studies
- Grade the evidence: Assess the strength of the scientific basis
- Conclusions

For further reading, see SBU's Assessment of methods in healthcare

[WWW.SBU.SE/EN/METHOD](http://WWW.SBU.SE/EN/METHOD)



# SBU publishes a number of different types of report

## **SBU Assesses**

Reports in the form of *SBU Assesses* always contain a systematic literature review of the overall scientific evidence supporting the effectiveness and safety of the measure in question. An analysis of health economics and ethics may also be included.

## **SBU Remarks**

*SBU Remarks* are shorter reports in which SBU comments on well-conducted international and Swedish reviews of a topic relevant to Swedish healthcare services.

Internationally, there are several organisations which undertake assessments similar to those by SBU, for example Cochrane Collaboration and Campbell Collaboration. SBU scrutinises the foreign review, assesses the quality and determines whether it can be extrapolated to Swedish conditions.

SBU does not scrutinise the individual studies on which the review is based.

## **Basic information for other government authorities**

SBU also compiles scientific information for other government authorities. The compilation is also published by SBU as a report.

## **SBU's inquiry service**

The inquiry service offers healthcare and social services personnel the opportunity to receive a quick response to questions on a limited, specific topic. SBU compiles a brief answer as to which published studies are available on different measures or procedures. The answers are composed by SBU's secretariat, often in consultation with an expert.

# SBU identifies scientific uncertainties

**IN AN ASSESSMENT**, SBU scrutinises the research published on a specific topic. Sometimes, on the basis of the available evidence, it is not possible to determine whether a measure is effective. Information about research topics in which knowledge gaps, or scientific uncertainties, have been identified, is stored in a database on SBU's website.

## **When can more research be required?**

- When there is no research at all on the measure in question
- When there are not enough studies or the available studies are too small
- When the research studies are of inadequate quality
- When the results of different studies are contradictory.

## **The effect of a measure is unclear**

The lack of research does not necessarily mean that the measure is ineffective, just that we don't know. Scientific uncertainties are fields where more research is needed.

## **Scientific uncertainties**

- Indicate to researchers and research funding bodies where there is a need for more research.
- Are taken into account by decision-makers when prioritising measures to be applied in healthcare and social services.
- Alert patients, clients and professionals in a certain field that there is uncertainty about the effect of a measure.



It's also useful to find out  
what we don't know



Health is also  
part of everyday life

# Broadening SBU's scope

**FOR MANY YEARS** SBU's mission was limited to assessment of measures used within the health and medical services. However, SBU's method of conducting and compiling systematic scientific reviews can be applied to other fields of research.

SBU has therefore been assigned the task of assessing the state of knowledge underlying methods in fields other than traditional health and medical care. Since 2015, SBU's mission has been expanded to include assessment of measures used in the social services and LSS (Law regulating Support and Service to Persons with Certain Functional Disabilities).

## **Workplace environment and health**

One example of a comprehensive project is SBU's workplace assessment, with special reference to the important influence of the workplace environment on health. The assessments cover common health issues. To date SBU has assessed the evidence underlying the relationship between the workplace environment and sleep disturbance, back problems, depression, fatigue and cardiovascular disease.

Other examples of the breadth of SBU's fields are assessment of measures for treating dyslexia and assessment of strategies intended to promote physical activity.

# How SBU's findings are disseminated

## **Website**

SBU's reports are published on our website [WWW.SBU/EN](http://WWW.SBU/EN). Some of the results are translated into English.

## **Newsletter and newspaper**

SBU's reports are disseminated in the form of a newsletter and can be subscribed to by email. At [WWW.SBU.SE/SUBSCRIBE](http://WWW.SBU.SE/SUBSCRIBE) you can subscribe to our free newspaper Medical and Social Science & Practice.

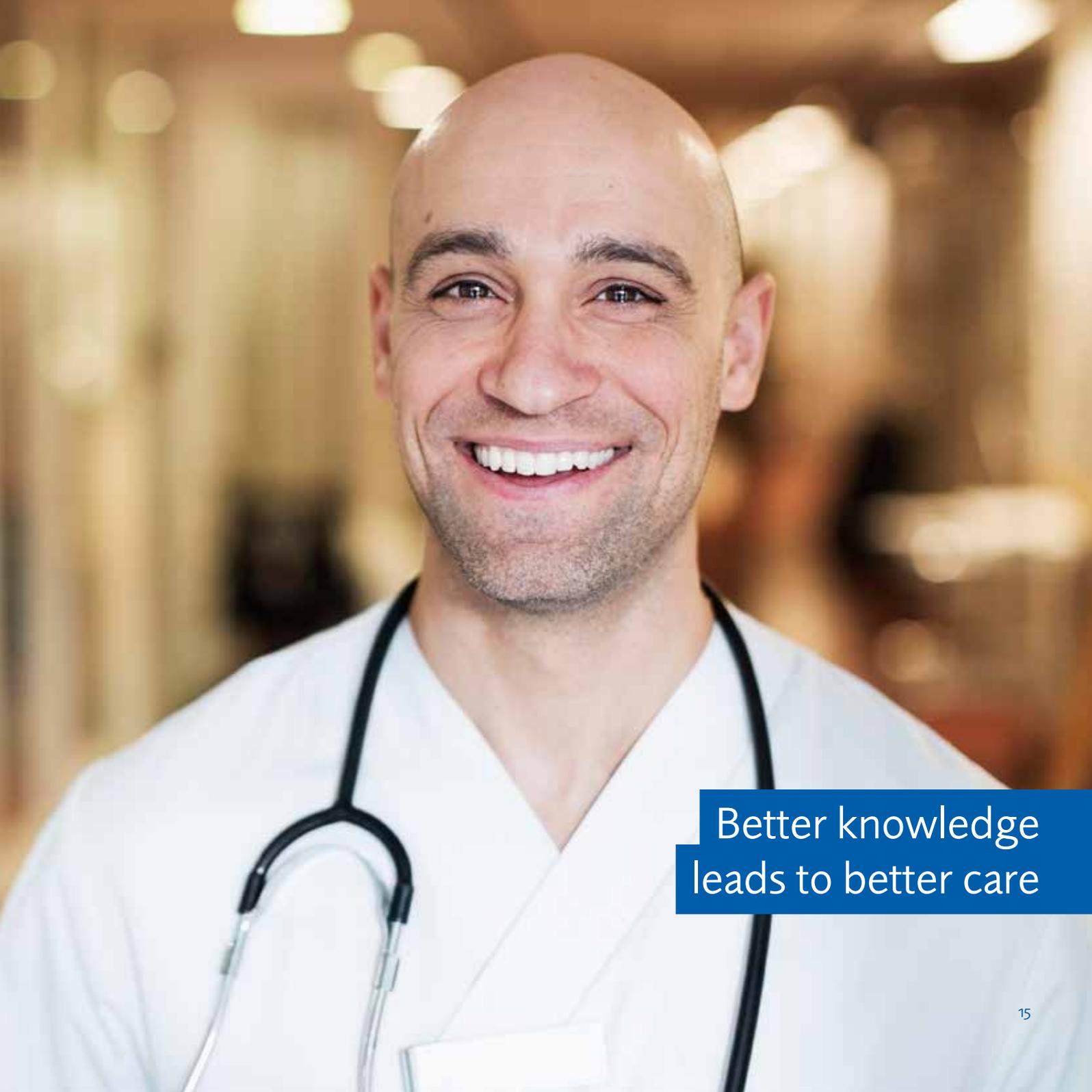
## **Media**

Our conclusions are often reported in the press, on radio and television and also among professional, patient and user organisations. SBU is also to be found on social media such as YouTube ([YOUTUBE.COM/USER/SBUKUNSKAPSCENTRUM](http://YOUTUBE.COM/USER/SBUKUNSKAPSCENTRUM)) and Twitter ([TWITTER.COM/SBU\\_SE](http://TWITTER.COM/SBU_SE)).

## **National and international Collaboration**

SBU collaborates nationally and internationally. For example, within Sweden we collaborate with the National Board of Health and Welfare, the Medical Products Agency, the Dental and Pharmaceutical Benefits Agency as well as professional and user organisations. SBU also belongs to the Swedish HTA network, with other regional HTA organisations that use SBU's health technology methods. A similar network for those assessing social services is currently under development.

The government has appointed SBU as Sweden's representative in the HTA network within the World Health Organization (WHO) and EU. SBU runs several international projects, both at the global level and within EU.



Better knowledge  
leads to better care

SBU is an abbreviation for the Swedish Agency for Health Technology Assessment and Assessment of Social Services. We are a government authority committed to improving health and social services by providing independent systematic reviews of scientific evidence.

We assess technology used in medical and social services from medical, social, ethical and economic perspectives.

SBU systematically scrutinises research publications in order to present the most reliable available evidence. Our reports disclose the most beneficial measures and identify the best use of available resources.



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