

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



# SBU assesses healthcare and social services interventions

#### THE SWEDISH AGENCY for Health

Technology Assessment and Assessment of Social Services (SBU) is a government authority under the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. We conduct independent scientific assessments of methods and interventions in a number of fields:

- healthcare
- dentistry
- social services
- functioning and disability
- impact of working environment on general health.

We evaluate the effect of various methods and interventions, whether they involve any risks or ethical problems, how they are experienced, and what provides the best cost-benefit ratio.

We also identify methods and interventions with poorly understood efficacy and prioritise the evidence gaps that are most in need of applied research.

SBU's vision is to improve health and welfare through science-based knowledge.

## We compile scientific research

RESEARCHERS STUDY THE EFFECT of treatments and interventions and publish their findings in scientific journals. However, the volume of papers published is so large that it can be overwhelming. Hence, SBU can help by and summarising the research, ensuring that important decisions can be taken on a solid foundation of scientific knowledge.

### Helping society to provide the best possible care

SBU's assessments serve as support for decision-makers, for those working in medical or social services, and for other relevant stakeholders.

We also teach others how to perform well-conducted systematic reviews and to generate HTA/SIA reports.

### SBU is an independent government agency for HTA and SIA

Established in 1987, SBU is today a national expert authority for the methods used in the production of systematic reviews and reports on:

- HTA (Health Technology Assessment) a term denoting the evaluation of methods used in the healthcare sector.
- SIA (Social Intervention Assessment)
   a term denoting the evaluation of methods used in the social services sector.



# How an assessment is conducted

assessment, usually treatment methods or other procedures, are received from many sources – for example government agencies, healthcare and social service professionals or SBU's scientific advisory committee.

The main reason for undertaking an assessment is to determine whether a method or intervention 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 collates, assesses, and synthesizes existing research. 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 social support is effective. Relevant studies, that is the ones which address the question, are selected. These are assessed according to quality, systematically examining the risk of bias.

#### Projects large and small

When taking on a larger project, SBU recruits an interdisciplinary working group, comprising experts in the field of interest. The team helps to assess the collected scientific material. Health economic and ethical assessments are usually also undertaken.

#### **DEFINITION CHOICE OF REVIEW OF GRADING OF** OF QUESTION **LITERATURE STUDIES EVIDENCE &** CONCLUSIONS collating the forming the searching the assessing the scientific literature risk of bias in results from the structured way the studies included studies determining which determining the articles address · assessing the selection criteria the question certainty of for studies to be the evidence included drawing conclusions



## SBU's publication types

#### **SBU Assessment**

SBU Assessment reports (*SBU Utvärderar*) usually contain a systematic review of the compiled scientific material in terms of how effective and safe an intervention is. We consider all the studies that have been published on the intervention in question. An analysis of health economics and ethics may also be included.

#### **SBU Commentary**

SBU Commentary reports (SBU Kommenterar) are shorter reports in which SBU comments on well-conducted systematic reviews produced by other stakeholders, on a topic relevant to Swedish healthcare or social services. We scrutinise the systematic review and determine whether it can be extrapolated to Swedish conditions. Cochrane Collaboration and Campbell Collaboration are examples of international organisations that undertake assessments similar to those produced by SBU.

#### **SBU Evidence map**

SBU Evidence map reports (*SBU Kartlägger*) identify the systematic reviews of other stake-

holders and, occasionally, primary studies. These reports are usually based on a broader type of question. They identify areas where scientific evidence exists, and areas where reliable knowledge is lacking. Findings are presented in interactive evidence charts with links to the constituent reviews.

#### **SBU Policy support**

SBU Policy support (*SBU Bereder*) are reports compiling scientific source material for other government authorities. It could be, for example, when new national guidelines are to be drawn up.

#### **SBU Enquiry Service**

SBU also offers an information service that provides an overview of the current state of research for specific methods and interventions. SBU Enquiry Service (SBU's Upplysningstjänst) provides healthcare professionals and social workers with a prompt response about which well-made, published, systematic reviews are available for a particular intervention.

Short summaries can be found on WWW.SBU/EN

## SBU identifies evidence gaps

#### WHEN CONDUCTING AN ASSESSMENT.

SBU scrutinises the research published on a specific topic. Sometimes, however, it's impossible to determine whether a method or intervention is effective on the basis of the available scientific evidence. Such scientific uncertainties, or evidence gaps, are stored and published in a database on SBU's website as Evidence gaps (Vetenskapliga kunskapsluckor).

The lack of research does not necessarily mean that the measure is ineffective – just that we don't know. A scientific evidence gap, identified by SBU, exposes where reliable research is lacking.

#### When can more research be required?

- When there is no research at all on a particular intervention
- When published studies are too few or too small
- When published studies are of inadequate quality
- When the results of different studies are contradictory

### Prioritising the most urgent need for more research

Many fields end up having a great number of scientific uncertainties. Therefore, we prioritise which evidence gaps that are most in need of filling. This is achieved by collaborating closely with service professionals, patients and service users as well as their carers and families.

SBU Prioritisation aid reports (*Prioritering av vetenskapliga kunskapsluckor*) also provide evidence-based support for prioritising of health and social services, with special attention to practices that are harmful or ineffective.

#### 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 interventions to be applied in healthcare and social services.
- ...alert professionals, patients and clients in a particular field that there is uncertainty about the effect of an intervention.





## Broadening SBU's scope

#### SBU HAS BEEN ASSESSING HEALTHCARE

treatments for many years, developing methods for knowledge-based methodological excellence. But the internationally agreed method that SBU use for conducting and compiling systematic scientific reviews can also be applied to other research fields.

#### Also assessing social services – and more

In 2015, SBU's mission was expanded to include assessments of methods and interventions used in the social services.

Since then, SBU has conducted various reports on *social service* interventions and methods, for example on programmes promoting parenting, interventions designed to help people on long-term sick leave back into work and preventive anti-crime interventions.

Dentistry is another important field for SBU projects, as is functioning and disability.

SBU also assesses the evidence underlying the relationship between the influence of *workplace environment* on health, for example on back problems, sleep disturbance and pulmonary disease.

#### Educating for a more scientific perspective

SBU is a well-established, reliable agency for knowledge-based methodological excellence. We share our expertise and teach researchers, agency officials, operational managers, and professionals who use or generate their own systematic reviews or similar reports.

# How SBU's findings are disseminated

#### Website

Some of our reports, and summaries are translated into English. These can be found on our website, www.sbu.se/en.

#### Digital newsletter and media

SBU findings are reported in the SBU digital newsletter, which you can subscribe to by email. The newsletter is however only available in Swedish.

SBU news can also be found on some social media platforms, like LinkedIn and Facebook, and in our own play-channel.

Our conclusions are often cited in digital and printed media, radio and TV, and by professional, patient and user organisations.

#### National and international collaboration

In addition to collaboration with professional associations and patient or user organisations, SBU works through partnerships with both national and international bodies. For example, in Sweden we cooperate with the National Board of Health and Welfare, the

Public Health Agency of Sweden, the Family Law and Parental Support Authority, the Swedish Medical Products Agency, the Dental and Pharmaceutical Benefits Agency, and the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare.

SBU also belongs to the HTA network, a constellation of regional organisations that apply SBU's method.

SBU runs several international projects, both at a global level and within the EU.

In 2022, SBU initiated an international network in the field of social services: the International Network for Social Intervention Assessment (INSIA).

SBU is a founding member of the International Network of HTA agencies, INAHTA, as well as of the recently established Nordic HTA Network.

The government has appointed SBU as Sweden's representative in the HTA networks within the World Health Organization (WHO) and the EU.



