

RVS to the new cabinet: set the following four priorities for a fundamentally new public health & society policy

The consequences of the coronavirus crisis are a key issue for many members of the public, employees and administrators. It is clear that the coronavirus crisis not only affects our physical health but also our mental health, our way of life and our well-being. The Council for Public Health and Society (RVS) considered this issue last year and provided advice to the current cabinet several times. With a new cabinet coming in, the Council looks ahead. What are the perspectives? The advisory report 'Wissels omzetten voor een veerkrachtige samenleving' (Switching tracks towards a resilient society) is the Council's presentation of four priorities for the new cabinet.

The Council for Public Health and Society advises the cabinet and parliament about tomorrow's way of life and care delivery. The Council believes that a resilient society is crucial if the Netherlands is to be a healthy and pleasant country, both now and in the future. Such a society is capable of discussing major issues in a respectful debate, taking the body-blows and then bouncing back. Even before the coronavirus crisis, the Council was concerned about our resilience. The ever-increasing health inequalities undermine the resilience of our society.

COVID is exposing the problems

The blows being dealt by the coronavirus weaken that resilience yet further. Take the positions of young people and those with disabilities, for instance. Or the increasing uncertainty about livelihoods and growing doubts about the financial and organisational viability of our care and support systems. As the coronavirus crisis clearly shows that a change of direction is needed, the Council believes that now is the time for the new cabinet to start thinking and acting in a fundamentally different way. This starts by asking what kind of society we want to live in.

Time for a fundamental change of direction

As far as the Council is concerned, we should be aiming more for a mentally resilient and healthy society and focusing less on medical care for the individual – more on the quality of life and less on treatments for diseases. Make sure that at the national level, for instance, the conditions are right and provide funding for regional and local policies that address complex inequalities. Follow that up with efforts to justify, value and acknowledge the work done by healthcare professionals in a different way, to reduce bureaucracy and the number of care workers leaving the profession.

Four priorities

In the advisory report issued today, which is based on the Council's recent advice, the Council prioritises four fundamental policy shifts for public health and society. These priorities must be effected by the next cabinet to future-proof our health and our society:

- I. from individual care delivery to caring for society;
- II. from lifestyle to living environment;
- III. from production-driven to value-driven care and support;
- IV. from institutional interests to public interests and cooperation.

Changing tracks

To achieve these changes, the points on the tracks will have to be switched and interests will have to be uncoupled. Use other forms of funding to encourage working on shared interests above institutional interests, particularly where cooperation is crucial for good care delivery and support (e.g. acute care, elderly care, prevention, primary care, and support). Differentiate funding where possible by target group and type of care (such as population-based funding), rather than by provider. The Council would like to draw particular attention to tackling health inequalities and the underlying complex inequalities in our society. This is no longer an issue for individuals: it has become a social issue affecting the whole of society. The RVS calls on parliament and the new cabinet to make the most of this moment to prepare our care delivery and our society for the future.

Note for the editorial office

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