

Strategy brief: Novo Nordisk Foundation Social Strategy 2019–2023

The Novo Nordisk Foundation's social strategy aims to improve lives and prospects of vulnerable children and youth through education, competency development and health initiatives in Denmark.

Grants will be provided through a combination of selected *strategic partnerships* and *open calls* for applications that will be publicly available on our website.

Strategic focus area: Healthy Weight

The Foundation supports the development of healthy weight among children and youth in Denmark through initiatives that tackle the determinants of overweight to reduce the derived effects, including impaired health and well-being, low self-esteem, social isolation and exclusion.

When entering school, 12% of children are overweight or obese, increasing to 20% when leaving school. Although, in general the prevalence of overweight and obesity among children in Denmark has stagnated, the prevalence among vulnerable children has increased due to the growing number of vulnerable children in Denmark.

Child obesity is a strong predictor for adult obesity with an increased risk of chronic lifestyle diseases like diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. Furthermore, among children, obesity is associated with an increased risk of depression, low self-esteem and various psychiatric disorders including eating disorders, as well as a significantly greater risk of being bullied.

Finding new solutions will therefore require a deep integration between the social sector and the health sector in Denmark not existing today. Here, the Foundation can take on the role as a catalyst and unifying actor in this field. The first initiative is the creation of a Healthy Weight Alliance, gathering researchers and practitioners together across disciplines to obtain and spread evidence within the field and put overweight and its consequences on the public agenda. By addressing the social bias in overweight and obesity, the Foundation supports children's equal opportunities for living healthy lives.

Strategic focus area: Learning opportunities

The objective of the Foundation is to improve learning opportunities for vulnerable children primarily by targeting preschool children and secondarily children in the age range 6-16 years.

Differences in children's prerequisites for development and learning can be detected early in the child's life. The difficulties with language, cognitive and socio-emotional skills are biased towards vulnerable children and when entering school, they can be up to two years behind classmates.

The differences are persistent through the Danish school system. When leaving school after ninth grade, between 15-20% of the graduates do not have the adequate learning capabilities required for further education.

The early stages of a child's life are crucial for the development of skills that form the basis of the child's further development and learning. Hence, the focus of improving learning opportunities will primarily be on early intervention, preschool and subsequently on interventions for children aged 6-16 years.

The Foundation has an opportunity for impact within this field by supporting and further developing existing initiatives that have shown good results.

To further pursue the objective, the Foundation will collaborate with other foundations, organizations already engaged in this field. By addressing differences in learning prerequisites at an early age, the Foundation helps improve the prospects and lives of socially vulnerable children.

Strategic focus area: New ideas in health

This grant type will address health challenges amongst socially vulnerable people. The new ideas to be supported comprise a broader perspective on obesity and other lifestyle diseases than the healthy weight initiative. This pool will be around 20M DKK with a grant size of 2-7M DKK as support for target groups that are vulnerable and underprioritized in the public health sector and the priorities can differ from year to year to include different groups and support different health and lifestyle issues.

Grant vehicles

The foundation will work through strategic partnerships implemented through the most suitable partners. This will include capacity-building of local partners and organizations as well as support for research initiatives to identify good practices and scalable solutions. Furthermore, support will be granted through open thematic calls focusing on projects aligned with the strategic focus areas of the social strategy. Lastly, the foundation is working on the development and establishment of a new national center for promoting healthy weight through collaborative research, innovation and development of evidence-based interventions and prevention efforts with a focus on children and their families.