

## **Government proposal: Clients' freedom of choice in health and social services**

**The objective of the health and social services reform is to ensure equal and modern health and social services at reasonable costs. As part of the reform, freedom of choice will be improved for clients of health and social services. For this purpose the Government submitted to Parliament a proposal for an Act on Freedom of Choice on 9 May.**


The objective of the Act on Freedom of Choice is to speed up access to services and improve the quality and cost-effectiveness of services. Clients would have more freedom to choose the services that best suit them. Another important goal is to reinforce local primary-level services provided by health and social services centres and dental clinics. Health and social services centres would provide a wider range of services than at present, including even medical specialist services and social welfare services.


### **CLIENTS HAVE MORE FREEDOM OF CHOICE**




  
The client chooses a health and social services centre and a dental clinic, and makes a one-year commitment to these service providers.

  
If the client needs other services, he/she will receive them from an unincorporated county enterprise.

 **HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES VOUCHER**  
for example physiotherapy or orthodontic care

 **HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES VOUCHER**  
for example an operation in a private hospital

 **PERSONAL BUDGET**  
for example services for people with disabilities



## Clients have more freedom of choice

Clients' freedom of choice would be extended in 2019. Some counties would introduce the extended freedom of choice earlier and others later. As a result, you would have more freedom to choose a health and social services provider and its unit when you need services within the scope of freedom of choice. You could choose to get your services from a county-owned company, a private enterprise or an organisation. The client fee would be the same. You can also choose a unit of the unincorporated county enterprise from anywhere in Finland.

### Primary level: you can choose a health and social services centre and a dental clinic

- At the start of 2019 you would be able choose your dental clinic. The clinic would have to be in the register of service providers and approved by one of the counties. This means that the clinic meets all the necessary conditions for service providers.
- The freedom of choice would be extended further on 1 July 2019: you would have more freedom to choose your health and social services centre where you can visit nurses and GPs and get advice on social services.
- You can choose a health and social services centre and a dental clinic from anywhere in Finland. You sign up as a client of the health and social services centre or dental clinic of your choice either by using the national online service or otherwise in writing. Each county provides its residents with more detailed instructions on how and when to list as a client.
- Assistance is available for those who need help in making the choice. Freedom of choice is entirely voluntary. Clients who do not make the choice themselves will be signed up by their county as clients in the health and social services centre and dental clinic with easiest access.
- Children can choose their service provider once they turn 15 years of age, before that their parent or custodian chooses for them. Clients are not always able to choose their service provider, for example due to memory disorder. In such cases the county investigates the client's will together with his or her legal representative, relative or other close person.
- You can change your service provider after at least one year has elapsed from your previous choice. If you choose a service provider that has several units across the country, you can visit any one of the units.
- If for reasons of work, studies or recreation you are temporarily residing in a municipality where your chosen service provider is not operating, you can visit some other service provider's health and social services centre or dental clinic. However, you must notify your own county either using the national online service or otherwise in writing that you are using another service provider on grounds of temporary residence.
- A client care plan will be drawn up for you if you need one, detailing the services you are receiving. If you are also receiving social services you will be designated a primary worker. Your service provider can grant you a health and social services voucher which you can then use to get services from other service providers. For example, when you get a referral to physiotherapy from a GP in your health and social services centre, you can also get a services voucher which you can use to visit the physiotherapist of your choosing.



- Health and social services vouchers give you more freedom to choose the services that best suit you. You can choose any one of the county-approved service providers. This ensures the quality of services.
- The aim is to further expand the range of services in health and social services centres by 2022. This means that by then you could go to your health and social services centre to see a specialist, get guidance and advice on mental health or alcohol and drug use. You could also get short-term social services, such as social guidance, home services, home care, child guidance and family counselling. Counties could also decide to provide their maternity and child welfare clinic services in health and social services centres.
- In bilingual municipalities the health and social services centres and dental clinics must serve clients in Finnish and Swedish unless the county has granted exception.

#### **Other health and social services: unincorporated county enterprises**

- The Government proposes that unincorporated county enterprises provide the health and social services not available in health and social services centres and dental clinics. You can contact directly a unit of the unincorporated county enterprise. An exception to this rule is non-urgent hospital treatment for which you need a referral from your physician.
- Services provided by unincorporated county enterprises are also within the scope of freedom of choice. You can choose a unit of the unincorporated county enterprise from anywhere in Finland. For example, you can choose the hospital performing your non-urgent surgery. The referring physician will advise you on which unit to choose.
- If you do not want to choose the unit yourself, the county will direct you to a suitable unit.
- You can get urgent care and first aid in units providing urgent and emergency care services, just as before.
- The unincorporated county enterprises make official decisions and exercise public power.
- Freedom of choice does not include school health services and student health services for students in upper secondary education.

#### **Health and social services voucher and personal budget**

- The unincorporated county enterprise will evaluate your situation and you can get a client care plan. Based on your client care plan, you can get the services you need either directly from a unit of the unincorporated county enterprise or by using the health and social services voucher or personal budget your county has granted you.
- The service providers receive compensation from the counties for services delivered against services vouchers or personal budgets. Clients do not get money from the counties.
- Each county decides which services are available through health and social services vouchers. With a services voucher you can yourself choose which registered service provider to see.



- Personal budgets are available for those who need services for older people or people with disabilities. Counties can introduce personal budgets even for other health and social services. The personal budget allows you to choose your service providers from all registered service providers from anywhere in Finland.
  - The health and social services voucher allows you to get home services, for example, or choose the hospital performing an operation on you, provided that your county has introduced the voucher for these services.
  - You are eligible for a personal budget if you are a client in services for older people, people with disabilities or people with intellectual disabilities. You can then decide yourself which provider will deliver you the services recorded in your client care plan. In this way you will get services that best suit your situation. The personal budget is valid either for a fixed term or indefinitely.
- You are not obliged to accept the services voucher or personal budget offered to you. In such cases your unincorporated county enterprise will organise your health and social services in some other way.
- Online services, client advisers and service coordinators will guide and support you in choosing the services that best meet your needs.

#### **Occupational healthcare and private health and social services**

- There will be occupational healthcare services paid for by employers even in future. Similarly, clients could still get private health and social services on their own expense, for example, using a private health insurance. Costs for health services outside the scope of freedom of choice will not be eligible for health insurance reimbursement after a transition period.

#### **Better access to information about service quality and waiting times**

- The Government proposes that the counties have the obligation to inform residents about their rights and benefits and help them in using health and social services. The counties would be responsible for ensuring that residents have sufficient information for choosing their health and social services.
- The counties provide online information about health and social services centres, dental clinics, service providers delivering services against health and social services vouchers as well as personal budget services. This online service has also information about the quality and availability of services.
- Health and social services centres and dental clinics must provide online up-to-date information about their capacity to take on new clients as well as their effective waiting times. Service providers must accept all clients in order of registration if they have capacity to take on new clients.
- Health and social services centres and dental clinics must give their clients information about the service providers they have approved to deliver services against health and social services vouchers. Service providers approved to deliver services against health and social services vouchers or personal budget must provide online up-to-date information about the relevant services and waiting times.
- Clients have the right to receive the information provided in the online service even orally or in writing.
- Guidance and advice services must pay particular attention to clients who need a wide range of integrated services or special support.



- Health and social services centres, dental clinics and providers approved to deliver services against health and social services vouchers must issue annual reports on revenue, taxes paid and place of taxation, profit and loss, management salaries and bonuses as well as on corporate social responsibility, among others.
- The Act on the Openness of Government Activities and the Administrative Procedure Act apply to all service providers. Under the Act on the Openness of Government Activities, official documents are in the public domain, unless specifically otherwise provided in an Act.

## **Counties organise all publicly funded health and social services**

- The organisation of health and social services will be transferred from the municipalities to the counties on 1 January 2019. The counties will be responsible for organising publicly funded health and social services in their area. They will receive their funding from the state but decide themselves how to use the funds.
- The counties will be responsible for ensuring that all residents get the services they need and that services by all service providers form a well-functioning system that runs smoothly and efficiently. The counties will pay compensation to service providers for the services they have provided to county residents.
- The counties and a national supervision authority will monitor the service providers' activities. Clients who are not satisfied with the service they received will have the right to submit an objection to the service provider or make a complaint to the national supervisory authority or have the matter investigated by the county.

## **Act on Freedom of choice enters into force on 1 January 2019**

The Government submitted to Parliament a proposal on an Act on Freedom of Choice on 9 May 2017. Parliament will decide by autumn whether to accept the legislative proposal. The Act is scheduled to enter into force on 1 January 2019 at the same time the counties assume the responsibility for organising public health and social services. Dental clinics would start their operations from 1 January 2019 onwards, and the counties would introduce health and social services vouchers and personal budgets. Client's right to choose a unit of the unincorporated county enterprise would also enter into force on 1 January 2019.

Since the pace of preparations varies among counties, not all counties would establish health and social services centres at the same time. In some counties freedom of choice would be extended already in 2017 through pilot projects involving health and social services centres and personal budgets. As a rule the health and social services centres would start operating by 1 July 2019. By special permit counties could postpone the establishment of health and social services centres until 1 January 2021.

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