

National Institute of  
Occupational Health

# **Strategy for the National Institute of Occupational Health in Norway (STAMI) for the period 2006–2015.**

## **Vision**

A Norwegian working life capable of creating a working environment that prevents illness and promotes good health.

## **Overriding objective**

The National Institute of Occupational Health in Norway shall generate, utilise and disseminate knowledge concerning work and health.

## **Objectives**

The Institute will

- generate knowledge about the connection between work, illness and health
- map the connection between work and health, assess risk and contribute to preventive measures
- make the general public in Norway aware of connections between work and health

## **Values**

STAMI's research and knowledge dissemination shall be informed by quality and integrity as well as political neutrality and academic independence.

STAMI as an institution shall be characterised by decency, humanity, justice and respect.

## **Introduction Purpose of the strategy document**

The strategy document is meant to be an active governing document that explains the foundation and objectives of the National Institute of Occupational Health in Norway (STAMI) and lays out the general direction of the Institute for the forthcoming years. The strategic priorities provide a framework for planning and resource allocation. The concrete measures to realise the objectives are clarified in the Institute's annual plans.

The strategy document shall contribute to understanding of the Institute's objectives and tasks both internally and externally.

## **The strategy process at STAMI**

STAMI's last strategy document was completed in 2001. Since then, the Institute has undergone external academic evaluations and political assessments relating to both separation from, and merging with, other institutes. The academic evaluations were very positive, and the political assessments resulted in STAMI's becoming, from 1.1.2005, an administrative body with special powers, an independent but publicly financed institute under the Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion.

With this framework in place, it was a natural step to begin a new strategy process. After a self-searching internal review of the relevance of all projects at the Institute, the strategy work was undertaken in 2005 with a high degree of mandatory participation from the Institute's employees. Based on an established agreement on working methods, two specialist groups were set up to prepare proposals for fields in which STAMI shall be active over a 10-year perspective, as well as to propose concrete prioritisation of input factors for these fields. The working method produced proposals that could be brought together in a single joint document. This document formed the starting point for those parts of the strategy document concerned with research and investigation. The other strategy elements evolved through the usual involvement and interaction between the administration, specialist departments and union representatives.

Research involves time-consuming processes, and the development of scientific expertise at a high level requires both time and resources. As a consequence, research strategies should have both a longer-term perspective and longer effective period than is common in other fields. At the same time research strategies must have the flexibility necessary to be able to absorb new trends and any changes in societal needs or general conditions in the course of the effective period. The current strategy at STAMI has incorporated these elements and shall be a governing document for the Institute's profile for the next 10 years.

In step with altered societal needs the adopted strategy provides guidelines for new priorities at the Institute. Monitoring of Norwegian working life is strengthened through a new, national coordinating unit, and greater focus is placed on psychosocial and organisational R&D.

As the strategy is realised, it will be necessary for STAMI to organise itself in such a way that resources are invested where they can make the greatest contribution. In this context it will also be important to ensure new recruitment to replace the not inconsiderable percentage of the Institute's researchers who will reach retirement age in the next 10 years. In knowledge-based enterprises such as STAMI, the employees' expertise is the establishment's most important capital. Thus the Institute faces considerable challenges in relation to replacing and developing upon the substantial expertise our senior colleagues possess. At the same time this provides greater scope to implement strategic changes and invest in new fields when recruiting new expertise.

Research institutions with high scientific quality are heavily dependent on the individual researchers' expertise, creativity, wealth of ideas and, not least, collaborative abilities. The National Institute of Occupational health in Norway, with its ambition of multi-disciplinary integration of knowledge, is thus a good example of a research institution where the employees' expertise and abilities are our foremost capital. Consequently, the strategy document in both its overall and concise form provides considerable scope for creative expression of the individual's wealth of ideas – within the external strategic framework which reflects society's needs. Furthermore, the Institute's advisory council seeks constructive input and the possibility of real influence on STAMI's activities. The strategy will be accompanied by operational administrative tools related to Project planning assessment and reporting.

### **Scope and design of the strategy document**

The National Institute of Occupational Health in Norway has given a concise form to its strategy – streamlined further in relation to the previous strategy document. Wording from that occasion retains its validity, however: “Reality is changing at such a high and increasing rate that comprehensive planning in detail does not fulfil its function as an instrument of management. The form we have chosen here is clear and binding but simultaneously provides practical possibilities for updating.”

Oslo, September 2005

Trygve Eklund  
Director

### **Revision June 2010**

Half-way through the strategy period, the Institute's strategy has been updated on the basis of proposals from the Institute's management group, and some minor alterations have been made. In particular, the Institute's investment in monitoring the state of the working environment is further consolidated and described.

Since STAMI designed the current strategy, the Institute has developed and implemented an electronic project assessment system and appropriate procedures, as well as an electronic operational planning and reporting system.

Moreover, the Institute was reorganised in the spring of 2006 with departments formed to provide the best possible adaptation of the current strategy.

STAMI's international involvement has been considerably strengthened during the period through participation in, and contributions to, the inception of the Partnership for European Research in Occupational Safety and Health (PEROSH), as well as our approval as a World Health Organisation (WHO) Collaborating Centre from the autumn of 2009. The revised strategy has been sent to the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion for reference.

Oslo, June 2010

Trygve Eklund  
Director

## STAMI's purpose and tasks

The National Institute of Occupational Health in Norway (STAMI) is the national research institute within the field of working environment and occupational health. The Institute's overriding purpose is to generate, map and disseminate knowledge about work and health. The Institute's vision is for Norwegian working life to be capable of preventing illness and promoting good health.

STAMI shall generate knowledge concerning the connections between work, illness and health by uncovering risks and understanding causal relationships regarding conditions in working life that may be of significance in the development of illness and ailments.

The National Institute of Occupational health in Norway bases its efforts on multi-disciplinary integration of science-based knowledge about working life and health.

Interaction between research, investigation, monitoring and consultancy/service provision is fundamental to STAMI's operations and strategic planning. These activities support each other, with various time frames; research and monitoring are typically long-term processes, investigation of shorter duration in terms of years, while consultancy/service provision generally has a short-term perspective. Communication – including information, training and education – is a prerequisite of STAMI's knowledge and expertise benefitting society and is to be increasingly integrated with the Institutes' other basic activities.



As the national institute within the sector, STAMI is to attend to society's research needs relating to the working environment. The Institute will attempt to strike a balance between applied research<sup>1</sup> and targeted basic research<sup>2</sup> in order to have the professional contingency capable for undertaking effective assessment of issues in Norwegian working life. Distinguishing between applied research and targeted basic research does not imply any difference in quality between the two, only that their respective starting points differ.

### **More about research project funding and social benefit**

The financing of long-term, costly and frequently equipment-heavy health-related working environment research in Norway, is, as in other countries, barely possible to imagine on the basis of a pure market assignment approach. Research results that contribute to improved occupational health and working environment often fall into the category that provides societal benefit, but which only exceptionally appear as profitable for the individual concern to pay for in a short-term perspective. Thus there is no tradition or market in Norway for any particular degree of non-public funding of socially beneficial and required research in the field of working environment and health. Most of STAMI's research projects will therefore be financed from both the Institute's basic grant and from external contributors. Such a financing model requires that STAMI can document that the project in question has positive professional repercussions for the business and society at large. Positive professional repercussions are defined in this context as the project's obtaining new knowledge relating to the working environment that may be able to contribute to preventing illness and promote good health, and that the results of the project are disseminated and made openly available to anyone who wishes to benefit from them. Partial or full public financing of projects ensures openness concerning the results in the form of a publication requirement. Publication in peer-reviewed journals also contributes to quality assurance of the research. STAMI shall always openly publish the results of our research projects and whenever possible seek to publish them in peer-reviewed international scientific journals.

Such matters must be documented through the Institute's project assessment system by elaborating upon the project's relevance in relation to the working environment, social benefit, openness concerning results and financial and research-administrative aspects.

### **STAMI's strengths**

STAMI considers its core competence, i.e. the organisation's "lasting competitive advantage", to lie in its cross-disciplinary integration of knowledge. In particular, knowledge is linked to "multi-disciplinary breadth within working life and health" and "understanding mechanisms". Important areas of expertise and support skills are:

- knowledge about Norwegian working life and its health agencies
- knowledge about chemical and biological exposure in working life
- expertise in selected fields within occupational medicine, occupational chemistry, epidemiology, physiology and toxicology
- knowledge of psychological and organisational work-environment factors
- knowledge of monitoring of working environment and health, and knowledge of available sources
- documentation and communication skills

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<sup>1</sup> Activity of an original nature to acquire new knowledge, primarily aimed at specific practical goals or applications (OECD's adopted definition of applied research).

<sup>2</sup> Basic research undertaken in the expectation that the knowledge acquired will provide a broad knowledge base as a background for solving current and future practical problems (OECD formulation about targeted basic research).

## Target groups

Norwegian working life and Norwegian society are the ultimate target groups for the work of the National Institute of Occupational Health in Norway. The most important concrete target groups for the Institute are:

### **Employer and employee organisations**

The Institute shall be the key body of reference within its field and form the academic community it is natural to contact for information, advice, guidance and assistance for major workplace/industry surveys as well as for carrying out research projects.

### **Managers and employees in enterprises**

The Institute shall be a key premise provider and reference institution for research-based knowledge concerning working environment issues. This target group is important because managers are responsible for the working environment in companies and the employees must contribute to health prevention work.

### **Safety and health staff in enterprises and in the occupational health service**

The Institute shall be a key specialist community that it is natural to contact to obtain information, education, advice and guidance. The Occupational Health Service Secretariat is an important contributor to this work.

### **The working environment authorities**

The Institute shall function as a premise provider and consultant, and as a national reference institute within work and health. The Institute shall disseminate knowledge of the subject to the working environment authorities as a basis for laws and regulations and assist with the knowledge basis for special campaigns and inspection tasks. The Institute shall work in close collaboration with the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority and the Petroleum Safety Authority Norway. The authorities' needs shall provide an important basis for the Institute's priorities. The collaboration shall be incorporated at an overall strategic level.

### **The health service**

The Institute shall be a reference institute within occupational health, and is tasked with the responsibility of national coordination within the field of occupational health. The Institute functions as an educational institution for the specialty of occupational health and shall disseminate knowledge about the connections between work and health to health personnel. The health service is a natural partner for collaboration in research projects where other expertise than the Institute itself possesses is needed.

### **Research communities**

To research communities, the Institute shall be an attractive, natural partner for collaboration on research projects within the Institute's fields of expertise, on both a national and international basis. STAMI is an active participant in the education of researchers/PhD students and master's degree students through the university system. Our international sister institutions and university communities function as a reference for the Institute's scientific activity and set the standard for our research work.

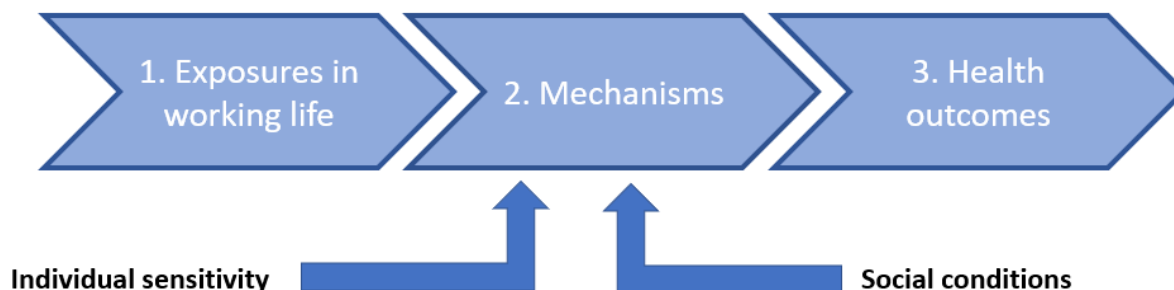
### **Framework setters and decision makers**

The Institute shall provide assistance to the political community and other decision makers with value neutral knowledge so that prioritisation relating to work and health is undertaken on the best possible premisses.

## Research

### Strategic model for placement of STAMI's research activities

In working life people are subject to different kinds of exposure, which through more or less complicated mechanisms of a chemical/biological/psychological and social nature, cause illness or impact health, as illustrated in the figure below (relevance axis):



STAMI's research shall embrace points 1, 2 and 3. Research projects at STAMI shall strive towards integration of these three areas. Knowledge of causes requires knowledge of both conditions of risk and mechanisms. All research activity at STAMI must be able to be accounted for and placed in line with the above figure (relevance axis).

### Criteria for choice of assignments

The Institute prioritises its research assignments in consideration of six criteria:

- potential for prevention
- national importance
- extent and severity of illnesses and ailments in the population
- research ability
- scientific importance
- own expertise and resources available

All research activity at STAMI shall be cemented in, documented and quality assured through the Institute's own electronic project evaluation system.

### Overall research strategy:

STAMI shall, through relevant, effective, quality-assured research at a high international level, provide scientific contributions within the Institute's field of activity.

The Institute shall emphasise the utilisation of its breadth in cross-disciplinary and multidisciplinary research projects.

STAMI's strength and advantage is its multidisciplinary breadth of method and infrastructure covering:

- epidemiology
- characterisation of exposure at workplaces and in experimental laboratory studies
- chemical, physiological, biological, molecular-biological and psychological measurements
- human and animal models

STAMI shall build further based on these advantages.



### **Prioritised fields of research:**

Research at STAMI shall have relevance for work and health. Conditions of both positive and negative significance for health and ability to work are studied. The following research fields are those which the Institute gives highest priority and in which the Institute must at all times maintain a high level of expertise:

#### Exposure in working life

- psychological, social and organisational working environment factors, including work-time arrangements
- chemical and biological working environment factors
- impact on musculoskeletal system
- accidents

#### Mechanisms for work-related health impacts

- biological, physiological and chemical/biochemical mechanisms
- psychological mechanisms
- social mechanisms
- individual sensitivity

#### Health impacts

- musculoskeletal ailments
- respiratory illnesses
- impacts on the central nervous system
- cardiovascular diseases
- cancers
- mental health

Research in the following areas shall be strengthened during the period:

- psychological, social and organisational working environment factors
- musculoskeletal ailments

The use of resources must, as early as possible in the course of the current strategy period, be adjusted in the following way:

- chemical/biological working environment: 50%
- psychological, social and organisational working: 25%
- musculoskeletal ailments: 25%

This prioritised list is generally non-exclusive. Research projects in other specialist fields within working environment and health will be assessed on a case by case basis should the need arise.

STAMI's research profile shall be 80% applied research and 20% targeted basic research.

## Investigation, services and advice

### **Overall strategy for investigation, services and advice**

STAMI shall map the connection between work and health, assess risk and propose preventive measures.

As an independent national research institute and seat of expertise, STAMI performs specific services, gives advice and undertakes investigation in all areas, and for all target groups, within STAMI's sphere of activity.

### **Prioritised tasks**

#### Clinical services

- occupational medicine polyclinic
- coordination of the occupational medicine field in Norway

#### Investigation of the connections between work and health

- map exposure and health conditions in working life
- give advice within regulatory toxicology
- advise authorities and decision-makers
- general advice on the subject
- be a centre of expertise for the occupational health service in Norway through the Occupational Health Service Secretariat

#### Exposure factors and sources

- offer advice on mapping and exposure
- offer laboratory analyses that STAMI is interested in and has specific reasons to perform, including hire of sample-taking equipment
- function as a reference laboratory for the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority
- run the national chemical exposure database, EXPO

## Monitoring and documentation of developments in the Norwegian working environment

The Institute, through National Occupational Health Surveillance (NOA), shall be responsible for improving, collecting, analysing and disseminating information about the working environment and work-related health in Norway, including making such information available to relevant users. The purpose is to monitor the field and track trends over time, thereby providing a basis for prioritisation by the authorities and parties to working life alike.

## Communication

Communication is a prerequisite of STAMI's knowledge and expertise benefitting society and is thus integrated into the Institute's other basic tasks. All STAMI employees are duty bound to communicate their work to the Institute's target groups. STAMI's communication work complies with government information policy. STAMI's societal role, tasks, expertise, objectives and target groups are the foundation of the communication work.

### **Overall communication strategy for STAMI**

STAMI shall make known the connection between work and health in Norway by

- ensuring STAMI's visibility as a research institute and necessary premise provider for working life
- making all of STAMI's activities visible to the defined target groups
- contributing to clarify, consolidate and develop STAMI's position as a research institution and provider of knowledge about the connection between health and the working environment in Norway

### **Prioritised means of action**

Several different means of action are employed in order to reach the objectives of the communication work:

- stami.no – with a weekly newsletter to subscribers about STAMI's research and other activities.
- dissemination of results from international research of interest to the Institute's target groups
- systematic contact with and society at large, PR and advocacy work
- seminars, courses and tuition
- news and factual information through STAMI factsheets "Work and health"
- digital project catalogue
- scientific publication in international journals
- national library and documentation centre for the field work and health

### **STAMI as an educational institution**

STAMI shall actively contribute to the Institute's knowledge being laid before Norwegian working life through seminars, courses and other tuition. As the national research institute and locus of expertise in relation to working environment and health, STAMI has a particular responsibility for educating researchers with expertise in the working environment field. This is to occur in collaboration with universities through master's and PhD studies, supplemented by post-doctorate appointments.

## Management and personnel development

### Overall strategy:

Management and personnel administration shall be exercised on the basis of social responsibility, professional quality and human considerations.

### Prioritised objectives:

- Management shall ensure that STAMI's value basis and objectives inform the entire organisation.
- The exercise of management at STAMI shall build upon the principles laid down in the document "Platform for management in the public sector".
- STAMI shall have a good working environment that promotes both scientific creativity and loyalty towards the Institute's objectives and strategies.
- STAMI shall strive to ensure that its employees have work tasks in accordance with the needs arising from the Institute's plans and objectives, and in correspondence with the employees' skills and interests.
- STAMI shall assess its needs in relation to competence in both the short and long term. STAMI shall, by means of employee interviews assess and develop employees' skills on an ongoing basis. In the event of under/over-staffing of needs employees shall be offered opportunities to develop their competence in the desired direction.
- STAMI management shall ensure to maintain a good, constructive relationship with the employees and their organisations.
- STAMI shall have a personnel and salary policy that rewards work results, responsibility and expertise, and which provides the Institute with the opportunity of securing qualified employees.
- STAMI shall have an organisational form which is at all times suitable for the tasks to be performed. Systems for planning and reporting shall be utilised for follow-up and assessment.
- All employees shall, through systems for internal communication, be familiar with where information about STAMI's governing documents and management decisions are available.
- STAMI is an IA enterprise with the obligations and rights this entails.
- STAMI shall have a life-phase policy in order to strengthen our capability to retain employees as long as possible and qualify younger employees as well as recruit new personnel.