

Public performance reports in social services

– limited contribution to good quality

Summary and recommendations

Public performance reports in social services are a compilation of indicators that the National Board of Health and Welfare produces in collaboration with the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) to help improve the quality social services. The audit shows that public performance reports give some, but limited, contribution to more equal social services of good quality. The National Board of Health and Welfare should develop the public performance reports into a more appropriate means of improving quality of social services and the Government should give the Board of Health and Welfare better conditions for this development.

Audit findings

Public performance reports are to be used by municipalities for follow-up, comparisons and development of social services and should meet their needs. At the same time they must facilitate central government governance with knowledge and be used for national follow-up and governance. The audit shows that public performance reports meet a need for both municipalities and central government. Since there are few alternatives to the annual national measurements that public performance reports constitute, we believe that they should remain, but their contribution to quality improvement could be greater.

For an individual municipality, the benefit of public performance reports is limited in relation to the number of indicators used, and the time spent on reporting results. Municipalities perceive what central government considers to be important for higher quality in social services and compare themselves to other municipalities. But our analyses show that municipalities do not clearly improve their results in public performance reports over time or in relation to comparable municipalities. This shows that central government governance with knowledge and municipal comparisons do not have much impact. Public performance reports have also decreased in importance for municipalities, and they are used to a limited extent for central government follow-up and governance.

Lack of individual-based statistics and evidence-based methods restricts the National Board of Health and Welfare's ability to develop indicators, complicates the control of data quality and makes data collection time consuming for the municipalities. However, the National Board of Health and Welfare could have done more and there is potential for improvement. In order for public performance reports to be a more effective means of quality development, the National Board of Health and Welfare should critically review the public performance report indicators and only retain those that are of clear benefit to quality development. The National Board of Health and Welfare should:

- investigate which indicators are not used by and are not beneficial to municipalities
- investigate whether and how the indicators used by municipalities contribute to quality development
- investigate which indicators are not used or met today but that could be useful if they are understood better by the municipalities, by clarifying the link to central government knowledge management
- remove the indicators that are not beneficial to municipalities, central government knowledge management or central government follow-up.

The National Board of Health and Welfare has already begun such work. The municipalities need to be involved in this work, and the results should be used to provide more precise support for municipalities to use public performance reports for quality development.

The National Board of Health and Welfare has limited legal potential to collect and manage individual-based statistics from municipalities. This adversely affects the ability to develop public performance reports and the follow-up of social services as a whole. The Government should therefore initiate the legislative amendments required to extend the National Board of Health and Welfare's statistics mandate. In the long run, this would probably also facilitate data collection from the municipalities.

The Government should also take measures to coordinate the various national compilations of social services indicators that have developed in parallel with public performance reports. This would reduce the risk of different indicator summaries with roughly the same content and thus deficiencies. It would also mean that the municipalities would not need to report similar information to several different surveys.

Recommendations

In order to strengthen quality development in the social services through public performance reports, the Swedish NAO makes the following recommendations to the National Board of Health and Welfare:

- Carry out a critical review of the indicators in public performance reports. The purpose of the review should be that only indicators with clear benefits for municipalities, central government governance with knowledge or national follow-up should be included in public performance reports.
- Improve and adapt support to municipalities to use public performance reports for quality development based on the review of the indicators.

The Swedish NAO makes the following recommendations to the Government:

- Take the initiative to give the National Board of Health and Welfare better opportunities to obtain and manage individual-based statistics.
- Take measures to create a more cohesive system for the indicator-based follow-up of social services.