

Entrepreneurship and welfare services in rural areas

- a needs assessment of older adults in Ostrobothnia



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Background

In the Nordic countries, the public sector has met most of the health care and welfare service needs of older adults throughout the post-war era. However, recent developments and challenges, including the depopulation of rural areas, financial restraints, and the centralisation of welfare services, have produced new challenges for older adults. Therefore, the aim of this study is to provide a needs assessment of older adults' service needs and desires in rural areas, focusing on welfare services.

Methods

The study is based on combined methods, including a statistical background, interviews with professionals within social welfare, and older adults living in rural areas in Ostrobothnia.

Results

Based on the interviews, trends of service needs and desires of older adults are identified. Interviewees indicate that older adults would welcome several different service concepts provided close to or in their homes. The services that are identified as missing include services requiring familiarity with the service provider and mutual trust, which are not easily offered by anonymous or distant providers or by digital means. Though several of the interviewees would be prepared to purchase additional services to those provided by the Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia, the study reveals that the knowledge of available entrepreneurs, as well as knowledge of financial support and tax reductions is rather weak.

Discussion

Initial findings of this study indicate that private entrepreneurs have a niche within welfare services to deploy. However, entrepreneurs need to be active in marketing their existence locally, while the knowledge of financial aid and tax reduction needs to be enhanced among both providers and purchasers.



Figure 1: Development needs for entrepreneurs and older adults in rural areas

Learning Outcomes

This study provides a better understanding of the service needs of older adults in rural areas, with a focus on welfare services. The study highlights the potential for private entrepreneurs to provide services that are currently missing in Ostrobothnian rural areas.

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