Odense, February 2, 2018

Dear editor,

Life expectancy has long been a prime indicator of population health. Increasingly, the importance of lifespan inequality as health policy objective is now being recognized. These policy goals may not coincide: mortality reduction amongst the very old increases both life expectancy and inequality. Yet when it can be convincingly demonstrated that both indicators can be improved through addressing the same causes of death, they give the very clear and consistent message to focus on those causes.

We present a strategy, applied to the case of Denmark, of analyzing these health policy goals simultaneously. We present cause-by-age decompositions that explain the evolution of Danish life expectancy and lifespan inequality over time (1960 to present), as well as the current differences with Sweden. We find that life expectancy and lifespan inequality give a consistent message to Denmark: attack infant mortality and cancer mortality to simultaneously reduce inequality and increase life expectancy. This finding vindicates our approach.

Because our manuscript addresses the important social issue of lifespan inequality alongside life expectancy, highlights the impact of major epidemiological trends like the smoking epidemic and the cardiovascular revolution on both life expectancy and lifespan inequality, and presents a strategy which can be broadly applied to other countries, we felt that the International Journal of Epidemiology would be the most suitable journal. We hope that you agree with this analysis.

We look forward to your response.

On behalf of all authors,

J-M Aburto,

M.J. Wensink MD PhD