

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

**HEALTH IMPROVEMENT OF THE POPULATION  
BY CREATING A CLUSTER IN BELARUSIAN FITNESS****Veronika Sadovnikova, Tatiana Polyakova**

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E-mail: [sadovnikova@tut.by](mailto:sadovnikova@tut.by), [nir@sport.edu.by](mailto:nir@sport.edu.by)**Abstract**

*World experience shows that the means of physical culture and sports have a universal ability of a complex approach to solving problems of people's health improving and formation of a sound psychological climate in labor collectives and in the community as a whole. Physical culture and sports is a preventive tool for health maintaining, promotion and prevention of various noninfectious diseases (cardiovascular, coronary heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, obesity, etc.) and bad habits (drinking, smoking, toxicomania, etc.). Moreover, as it is noted by American and European experts, the use of physical activity and sport in order to prevent morbidity requires very slight additional costs from the state. Currently, in Belarus there is an urgent need in drastic measures aimed at improving the quality of public health, formation of new guideline values in the youth, and in fitness culture development. Encompassing various forms of motor activity, fitness meets the needs of different social groups in sports and recreational activities at the expense of fitness programs diversity, their accessibility and emotionality. It promotes not only the motor, but also the general culture of the people involved. Possessing significant adaptation and integrative capabilities, fitness is a phenomenon of modern physical culture with a multifunctional impact on various spheres of public life. This favors its integration into all kinds of physical activities. Because of differences in the approaches of American, European and Belarusian practices in the use of fitness we propose improvement of public health by creating a cluster in fitness of Belarus.*

**Key words:** *physical culture, sport, fitness, improvement of public health, management, physical activity, sport for all, cluster.*

## Introduction

Most authors emphasize that the word “fitness” exists in all languages of the world without translation. It comes from the English verb «be fit» – to be in shape, feel good or be healthy. Theoretical analysis of interpretation of the term fitness in the former Soviet Union has confirmed that over the last 20 years the meaning of the word “fitness” often changed. In one case, the term is interpreted by scholars and practitioners as a new social phenomenon or physical state of a person, in the other case – as a set of means and techniques to achieve physical preparedness, figure correction, or as a format of a mass physical culture or as comprehensive health programs based on means and methods of bodybuilding.

According to Saykina (2015) this is because the phenomena identified by the term "fitness" in the United States and the countries of the former Soviet Union are not identical. According to Howley & Frenks (1998) in the American society "fitness" is considered much wider and in different contexts it can replace the concepts "physical culture", "physical training", "health", etc. In the Russian language the word "fitness" has acquired multiple meanings. Firstly, this term implies a set of measures providing versatile physical development of a person, improvement and formation of his/her health; according to Saykina (2009) fitness is a socio-cultural phenomenon. Secondly, according to Somkin (2002) fitness is a kind of sport which has been recently introduced in the framework of competitive bodybuilding. Also in our literature there is a division of fitness on general, physical and sports-oriented; according to Aftimichuk (2009) general fitness is one of the first areas of health improving physical culture, and a specialist working in the field of health improving physical culture is the very specialist in health and fitness, the product of whose activities are fitness programs.

Without an official proclamation, in contrast to the practice of European countries, starting from the mid 90s fitness industry in Belarus has been formed gradually and lives its own life – production and promotion of health and fitness technologies, marketing programs, equipment, specialized food, facilities and appliances, video, audio support, manuals. The age of today's fitness instructors in Belarus is from 18 (for example, students receiving education in secondary specialized educational institutions, institutions of higher education) up to 50 years old and more (people having more than one specialty and extensive experience in different fields of activity). The vast majority of successful and popular fitness instructors in Belarus due to their high competitiveness and having

no sports pedagogic education are moving rapidly up the career ladder and set the bar high in the labor market.

At present there is not a single mention in the regulations of the industry “Physical culture, sport and tourism” concerning fitness either as a form of mass physical culture, or its role and status. There is only one document that was created at the dawn of fitness in Belarus, which taking into account an acquired experience requires explicit corrections and additions. It is an order of the Ministry of Sports and Tourism of the Republic of Belarus on June 30, 1997 № 832 “On organization and provision of paid health and fitness services to the public by means of physical culture and sports”. However, this process is not organized, nor provided with legal support for purposeful and progressive development of “mass sports” or its actual manifestation – fitness. At present all paid services in our sphere have a recognizable and purchasable by the consumer name – “fitness services”.

In our opinion, this situation should be considered as a precedent for development a center of scientific, methodological, and practical support to all sports organizations engaged in paid services to the population of Belarus through various forms of mass physical culture, and in fact, recognized by the consumer as fitness. The purpose of the study is consolidation of industry experts, including sports management and marketing, in order to take mass sports (as a reserve for professional sport) in the Republic of Belarus to a new level of development, advocacy of scientific and practical interests of the industry from the perspective of international standards for services provision by means of physical culture and sports, i.e. legitimacy of the fitness industry as a kind of sports economy will be created.

As a result of our study for the first time in the theory and methodology of physical culture of Belarus a concept of fitness as a modern format of mass physical culture and sports industry will be presented. Health improving prospects of the population will be substantiated by means of fitness clustering in Belarus. In particular, based on the proposed concept the definition of the term fitness as a social phenomenon and a pedagogical knowledge based on the theory of health improving physical culture will be given; regularities influencing the industry of “Physical culture, sport and tourism” as a priority area of the state and public interests in the new socio-economic conditions of activity, profitable, attractive for investments both for the state and commercial structures will be revealed.

## **Material and Methods**

The following methods of empirical research are used: observation, social study, comparison and description. Were developed protocols of survey, interview and questionnaire survey of three target groups of respondents on the research topic to identify the actual mechanisms of functioning of the fitness industry. This group: consumers of fitness services (fitness services) by place of residence; producers – managers of sports organizations, structures (Directors and their deputies) providing health and fitness services (fitness services) by place of residence; trainers of fitness services (fitness services) by place of residence. Currently being collected questionnaire data from all three groups. The analysis of the survey and interviews mentioned categories of respondents. Consulting on the research vision and strategy with key industry leaders in the PE and S in the Republic of Belarus. In particular with the heads of structural subdivisions of the Ministry of sports and tourism of the Republic of Belarus, Deputy Director of the Republican training and methodological center of physical education, Director of the Republican scientific-practical center of sports, Directors of physical fitness centers in the districts of Minsk, the owners of commercial fitness organizations of Minsk. Cooperation with overseas colleagues, specialists of physical education from Budapest (Hungary), from Macolin, Berne (Switzerland), from Athens (Greece).

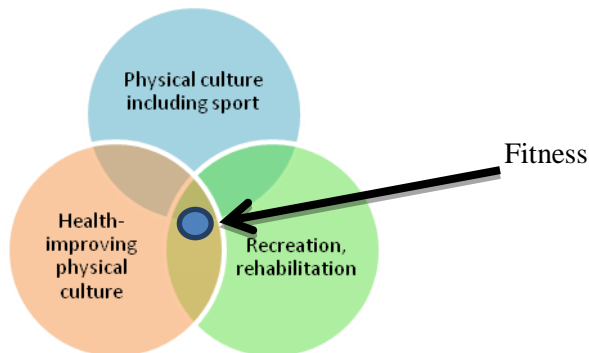
## **Results**

Formation and development of scientific and innovative sphere of the Republic of Belarus indicate the necessity for joint efforts of all participants of the process in the most effective and promising directions of the state scientific-and- technical and innovation policy realization. The world practice shows that the high level of competitiveness and sustainable economic growth are determined by the factors that promote the spread of new technologies, in particular, the use of the cluster approach. We believe that clustering as a method is currently one of the most promising for the sphere of sport and fitness. Belarusian market of fitness services exists for nearly 20 years. Taking into account an economic situation of the Belarusian market of services and a positive trend to increasing revenues in the public sector of the economy observed in recent years, experts have expressed optimistic forecasts for the development of fitness. According to the assessment given by Grigorjev (2007) a branch-wise clustering (Eng. cluster – aggregate, alliance) is a logical continuation of evolution providing concentration of all types of resources, the use of original and highly effective health promoting and training technologies, modern fitness and

sports equipment. The world practice shows that a synergistic effect achieved on the basis of clustering principles provides a technological breakthrough and dramatically increases the competitive ability of fitness.

Sport in the modern world is not only an industry, not only an important social service rendered by the state in the frames of the social policy for the health of the nation, but also the broadest consumer market producing as mass sports services in the form of sports events and physical training services, improving the quality of life of the population of Belarus, as well as a variety of sports material products including science intensive and high-technology ones (Supikov et al. 2005).

Socio-cultural inquiry identified the need for development and dissemination of innovations in the field of physical culture. A person's position in health improvement, his/her attitude to social, psychological, and physical health is now accepted as a decisive factor. This implies the essence of the concept of values and motivational attitudes formation of a personality with a healthy lifestyle orientation, which becomes the foundation of a modern society. New notions about human vital activities direct a person towards physical and spiritual development, feeling of well-being, mental and physical health. At the same time the emergence of innovative types of physical culture in Belarus is due to the rapid development of sports and recreation activities and first of all with the origin and growth of the fitness industry, where new fitness areas and a variety of fitness technologies with their own specific characters are being created.



We hold the opinion of the scientists Ponomarchuk (2005) and Saykina (2009) and ascertain that in Belarus fitness is also expressed as a sociocultural phenomenon which allows to use the potential of physical culture and sports in promoting health and physical capacity, improvement of physical status of healthy people and people in a state of pre-disease and/or with risk factors, their potential and social experience of physical

(somatic and functional) perfection of a person and a healthy lifestyle organization.

The scientific community should pay attention to the peculiarities of interpretation of the terms “physical culture” and “fitness” and their correlation with the concepts “physical culture” and “physical education” in the countries of the former Soviet Union and abroad.

In Belarus all the forms and their content in the educational process are approved and therefore are permissible to introduction in the process of physical education. Let us refer to the table "The place of fitness in physical culture of the population of Belarus" (Tab. 1).

**Table 1**

The place of fitness in physical culture of the population of Belarus

<i>Age period</i>		<i>Preschoolers</i>	<i>Pupils and students</i>	<i>Adult working population</i>	<i>Elderly</i>	<i>Motives factors</i>
<i>phenomenon</i>						
<b>Physical culture</b>		One of the aspects of a society's culture, reflecting its potential and social experience in physical (semantic and functional) perfection of a person and a healthy lifestyle organization				
Physical education	Form	As a process in an educational institution – in a form of lessons	–	–	External and internal	
	Normative basis	The Law on Physical Culture and Sport, The State Physical Culture and Health Improving Complex – a program and normative basis of physical education of the population of the Republic of Belarus				
<b>Health improving physical culture</b>		An aspect of culture that allows to use the potential of physical culture in promoting health and physical capacity, improvement of physical status of healthy people and people in a state of pre-disease and/or with risk factors				
Fitness	Form	Extracurricular forms – additional groups, circles, non-budget forms	Forms of health improving activities, more than 200	–	Internal	
	Normative basis	–	–	–		

## Discussion

It should be noted that abroad there is no such a concept as “physical culture”, and the notion that we imply in it reflects the concept “physical education”. In Belarus the concept “physical education” has a quite narrow and specific interpretation – it is a part of an educational process aimed at formation of motor skills, development of physical abilities and acquisition of knowledge in the field of physical culture and sports. Bailey and Dismore (2004) surveyed more than fifty countries in order to generate a “functional definition” of Physical Education (that is a description of what happens rather than an analytical account), as follows “those structured, supervised physical activities that take place at school and during the school day”. Or in the words of the Department for Education and Employment (2000), “...physical education’ is a statutory area of the school curriculum, concerned with developing pupils’ physical competence and confidence, and their ability to use these to perform in a range of activities... “(p. 129).

Today a scientific and practical contradiction is revealed – with the current needs for development of specific areas of the industry “Physical culture, sport and tourism” in Belarus, such as “sport for all”, “fitness”, adequate management mechanisms as a whole and on the regional and local levels are not developed. According to Saykina, A.Čuprika, A.Fernāte (2014) to date, the term “fitness”, widely spread in the world, in the countries of the former Soviet Union have very different interpretations, leading to terminological and methodological confusion Accordingly, this hinders its adoption by a certain part of the scientific community and the process of professional communication of practitioners in the field of physical culture.

The variety of definitions of the notion “fitness” proposed by the fitness founders on the post-Soviet territory, Russian scientists, practitioners Saykina, Lisitskaya & Sidneva (2002) and others are well known. In a market economy where fitness has come to us from and in isolation from the market the concept of fitness does not exist. To date no one has managed to present a well-designed scheme of justification and definition of the notion “fitness” for the market conditions in Belarus. Therefore there is no recognition of the phenomena and the consequent recognition of the reality of effectively functioning fitness industry and legitimate activities of fitness instructors. It is worth paying attention to the experience of bringing attention to this issue by Russian colleagues, particularly by Saikina (2015), “...analyzing the so motley and ambiguous picture inherent in nowadays activities in the field of sports and educational services, including in the field of fitness, one can assign all of its shortcomings to a lack of well

thought-out general normative legal basis that takes into account the interests of all parties (the state, founders, employers, administration, staff, and of course, consumers of different types of fitness services)... “(p. 5).

During the interviews and surveys of producers of fitness services in Belarus – managers of sports organizations, instructors and methodologists in the sphere of sports and recreation activities – in order to identify the actual mechanisms of the fitness industry functioning, it was revealed that these services are provided by them and are used by the population despite the lack of regulation and classification of such a range of services in the field of their activities. Understanding and sharing opinion concerning the leading role of the state and local authorities in development of mass sports and its recreational forms in overcoming a demographic crisis, prevention of addictive behavior of young people, changes in attitudes towards the environment, and improvement the quality of life of the population was noted as well.

The “mission” of the activities aimed at improvement of public health was also indicated by the respondents: to raise the percentage of participants in physical activities to the European level. In accordance with the global trend the problems of development of physical culture in our country becomes a key focus of social policy. Concern for physical culture development is an essential component of social policy of the state that ensures implementation of humanistic ideals, values and norms, which gives wide scope of people’s abilities detection, their interests and needs gratification, the human factor activation. However, at present only 16 – 25 % of the population in the country is engaged in physical activities, whereas in the economically developed countries this index reaches 40 – 60 %. In the analyzed array of legal documents concerning management mechanisms of health improvement of the population in the sphere of physical culture and sport not involved in the system of sports education – most often it is an adult, able-bodied population – there is no mention about fitness, including really existing, profitable, but not actually recognized. In our view there are sufficient quantities of physical culture programs of different levels and orientation, in particular for the specified segment of the population. The Decree of the Ministry of Sports and Tourism of the Republic of Belarus of 24.06.2008 N 17 adopted the State Sports Health-Improving Complex of the Republic of Belarus, the purpose of which is mass sports movement development in the Republic of Belarus aimed at health-improvement, general physical education, moral and patriotic education, promotion of healthy lifestyle of the nation by means of physical culture. It is worth paying attention that traditionally management of a “sport system” implies



also control of the processes of health-improvement of the population. But the realities of today demonstrated the impossibility of equal management of two different phenomena – sports and health-improvement.

In confirmation of Belarus desire to meet international standards in sports and rehabilitation management there is the Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus dated 24.11.2008 № 638 “On Accession of the Republic of Belarus to the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport” established by the resolution of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe CM/Res (2007) of May11, 2007 (EPAS), operating under the Council of Europe. It provides for close coordination of the efforts of states in order to promote “the development of sport for all”. Partial agreement is a flexible form of work in the frames of the Council of Europe. Some partial agreements provide an opportunity to the states non-members of the Council of Europe and international organizations as well to work together with the member states of the Council of Europe in order to achieve common objectives of mutual interest. The task of EPAS is to contribute to sports development in Europe, to popularize engagement in sports, and to exchange positive experiences in this area.

In order to determine the place of fitness as a social and cultural phenomenon in the process of health improvement of the population of Belarus one should pay attention to the essence of such historically proven systems of physical activity management of public organizations and movements as “Sport for All” and the World Health Organization (WHO). Today the “Sport for All” presents a general concept implying active recreation, sports development, programs involving a large mass of people, and cultural and recreational activities for the purpose of recreation and health improvement of all social groups adherent to this movement. This applies to any kind of sport which involves ordinary people without any serious professional loads typical of elite sport; therefore elimination nature of sporting events, based on competition, in this case is a secondary factor.

WHO (2010) developed “Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health” with the overall goal of presenting a guidance for policy-makers at the national and regional levels concerning relationships based on dependence “dose –response”, between the frequency, duration, intensity, type, and total amount of physical activity necessary for prevention of noncommunicable diseases. The recommendations stated in this document are intended for three age groups: 5 – 17, 18 – 64, and people aged 65 years and older.

In our opinion, today, in the absence of references to fitness in the regulatory documents of the branch “Physical culture, sport and tourism” of

the Republic of Belarus, it should be offered to the scientific community to draw its attention to the opportunities and potentialities of fitness as a socio-cultural phenomenon for health improvement of the nation by means of clustering. In our opinion, this situation should be viewed as a precedent to create a cluster of fitness, carrying out a function of a center of scientific, methodological and practical support to all sports organizations engaged in paid services to the population of Belarus through various forms of mass physical culture, and in fact, recognized by the consumer as fitness.

The results of our sociological study confirm the findings of Russian colleagues Somkin (2009) and Saykina (2009, 2015) concerning the presence of a social demand associated with an increase in sickness rate in post-Soviet countries, including Belarus, a general decline in the health status of the population, change in society demands for the level of physical and mental health of the population; increased human needs for self-actualization, self-identity, and self-knowledge. Economic expediency is in the same row: an intensive development of fitness industry and promoting fitness in the country, introduction of modern fitness technologies, demand for a large number of fitness services in different kinds of physical culture – education, sports, recreation, rehabilitation, in the form of extra services; expansion of the labor market, prestige and decent wages for specialists of the fitness industry. Since the priority of human health forms the basis of the ideology of fitness and goal setting, so the created fitness technologies are mainly of a recreational nature.

Based on the analysis of potential implementation of the cluster approach in Belarus including fitness, the following guidelines proposed by Smirnov (2007) are of the first priority:

- extension of the system of indices of innovation policy in the field of sport, their harmonization with the European statistics, improvement of methods of statistical survey of innovations;

- promotion of regional innovation policy, creation of regional development strategies, involving local authorities, universities, and business organizations, allocation of up to 20% of the funds of regional scientific and technical programs on "soft" support of health improvement of the population (elaboration of region development strategies);

- identification of sources for financial support of innovative infrastructure at the national and local levels, stimulation of inter-regional programs of innovative cooperation, using the resources of state and scientific-and-technical programs on health improvement of the population;

- promotion of consultations with associations of scientists, industry regulatory structures for selection of priorities for regional scientific-

technical and innovation development of control over the process of health improvement of the population by means of fitness;

- ensuring the transparency of information on the progress of applied research in sport and rehabilitation in Belarus; distribution of regions experience of European countries;

- promotion of fitness culture, a positive image of an entrepreneur by means of mass media; conduct of a national competition of fitness projects involving sponsors, that will enable to create “success stories” in fitness;

- assistance to international cooperation in the field of fitness, “soft support” to innovation activities using the capabilities of EU programs.

In the opinion of Mitenev & Kirik (2006) at present three standard approaches to formation of regional innovation clusters are widely used. The first involves the creation of extended working group on the basis of experts of a regional administration. Representatives of various regional organizations interested in creating a cluster and able to render actual help can be drawn in on the role of experts (participants).

The second involves cooperation of the authorities and management structures with existing regional research organizations, consulting firms, higher educational institutions, etc. Cooperation with such organizations is based on service contracts.

The third approach is relatively new for the post-Soviet countries. Its essence is in creation of a specialized organization that is “Economic Development Agency”. Regional authorities may be one of the founders, transferring for instance real estate objects and other property as a contribution to the authorized capital.

The procedure of clusters creating has its principles and terms. Clusters should be created gradually. At the first stage (preparatory) the urgency and general economic feasibility are found out, elaboration and testing of mechanisms for creation and development of clusters is carried out, and the decision on full-scale work on the project is made. At the main stage organizational and legal issues related to clusters formation are settled. The final stage involves the adjustment of the “portfolio” of priority clusters, forms and methods of state support on the basis of monitoring and analyzing the results of cluster formation and development of organizational documents, technical-technological and economic justifications Mitenev & Kirik (2006).

As a result in the field of “Physical culture, sport and tourism” of the Republic of Belarus, in the terms of the Ministry of Sport and Tourism activities such as “health improvement of the population” the following issues will be carried out:

- a general conceptual scheme of the theory and methodology of fitness based on health improving physical training as a social phenomenon enhancing the quality of life through physical and psychological status of a person (pedagogical aspect) will be developed;
- regularities of formation of value orientations and a lifestyle contributing to manifestation of fitness culture in representatives of all age groups of the population of Belarus (culturological aspect) will be revealed;
- marketing strategies of fitness will be developed, mechanisms of interaction of sports organizations with their environment in the market conditions of Belarus (economic aspect) will be described;
- general provisions of the methodology of the sphere of fitness activities management, as an industry of personnel and services, in accordance with international standards of market activities and competitiveness (administrative aspect) will be developed;
- specified problem-solving mechanisms for health improvement of the nation through fitness as an economically real sector of services in the field of physical culture and sport without expenditure of budget funds will be presented for application.

Practical implementation of the cluster development and creation should include the following activities:

Regional executive authorities in the field of cluster policy should encourage and support cluster initiatives. To do this they must carry out the following functions: information and analytical support of cluster policy; designing of a general strategy including motives, goals, objectives and directions of development policies of clusters; use of the existing tools and measures of economic policy for realization of cluster initiatives; financial support of regional initiatives on clusters development; assistance to international cooperation development in the sphere of cluster policy.

For of cluster initiatives financing the following budgetary funds can be raised:

- means of investment funds;
- means of innovative funds;
- funds allocated for free economic zones creation;
- funds for basic researches;
- means of small business development programs;
- funds allocated for regional scientific and technical programs;
- own funds of enterprises used on researches and development.

Despite the highest importance for national economy of innovative clusters formation and the highest interest of the state in innovative

development of region's economy, at present there are no state mechanisms of direct action aimed at territorial innovative clusters development.

Considering specifics of the Belarusian model of economic development where the high role of the state in management of economy and formation of priorities of economic development is inherent, it is expedient to create a tool which is urged to realize in practice the mechanism of carrying out a state policy of health improvement of the population of Belarus on problems of fitness clusters formation. Such a tool at the level of the republican regions and Minsk city could be the Republican Scientific and Practical Center of Physical Training of the Population, the Republican Scientific and Practical Center of Sport which tasks will also include organization and coordination of activities on creation of a cluster at all stages. For instance, all regional methodological centers of physical education of the population and sports clinics could become local branch offices.

The analysis of primary sources of the theory and practice of clusters formation allows to draw a conclusion that the most effective organizational form of creation of a cluster is a voluntary association of independent producers of services and goods for fitness, scientific and information products for health improvement. Business competition in the market of services serves as a stimulus for the presented activities of cluster participants. Under conditions of severe state regulation incentive motives for achievement of any results is control of planned performance realization by a higher authority. Thus each of a cluster participant is limited in his/her leeway. Such model is very effective in extreme, crisis conditions when the purpose is absolutely clear and it is known that its achievement is possible only at a full tension of all forces. But in conditions of free competition it suppresses the participants' initiative which is absolutely necessary for innovative activities. It follows from this that the most expedient is the organizational and legal form of a potential cluster as a voluntary association of independent producers on the terms of direct economic contracts without formation of a new juridical entity. According to Alyokhin (2014) at a starting stage of a cluster creation this form doesn't exclude existence of some mechanism providing coordination and organizational support of the process.

## **Conclusions**

In industrial and post-industrial societies sport as a sociocultural phenomenon has a civilization transformation, joins in the general system of international cooperation, communicative and information exchange in conditions of globalization. Health improving and sports activities of

foreign countries are characterized by an organic combination of conditions created by the state, its government, public, and private organizations and establishments. Analysis of the Belarusian sports and health improving system shows some features of its own. Their organizational structures depend on the state's purposes and extent of its participation in systems functioning. In our opinion creation of a cluster in fitness of Belarus will promote consolidation of specialists of the branch, including sports management and marketing, for the purpose of taking a mass sport (as a reserve for professional sport) in the Republic of Belarus to a new level of development, advocacy of scientific and practical interests of the branch from positions of international standards of rendering services by means of physical culture and sport, i.e. legitimacy of the fitness industry will be created as one of the types of sports economics. We consider that development of mass sport, sport for all, and fitness as a means of health improvement through local authorities, sports organizations and establishments at this level is a prerogative of the state and, of course, the population. Consequently there are sufficient conditions for creation and realization of a cluster in fitness of Belarus aimed at health improvement of the population.

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