

TDRI praises benefits of ThaiHealth

Researchers laud efforts, call for more openness

PARITTA WANGKIAT

More than 1,000 health-promoting projects and activities run by the Thai Health Promotion Foundation (ThaiHealth) have benefited society, the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) says.

But the TDRI's research, released yesterday, said the organisation must become more financially transparent and should release more details of its activities.

TDRI's research took place over one year to assess ThaiHealth's projects. It used a method of Social Return on Investment (SROI) — a principles-based method for measuring extra-financial value relative to resources invested.

More than 1,000 health-promoting projects and activities have been funded nationwide by ThaiHealth.

The projects involved reducing a wide range of health risks such as smoking, alcohol consumption, road accidents, junk food and the use of toxic materials.

In addition to making the public healthier, ThaiHealth's projects helped reduce economic losses, the TDRI said.

The TDRI highlighted ThaiHealth's road safety campaign.

Since ThaiHealth was established in 2001, the number of road accidents dropped from 124,530 in 2003 to 74,359 in 2010.

ThaiHealth funded roughly 1.5 billion baht for road safety campaigns nationwide between 2001-2010. The TDRI estimates that the campaign eliminated more than 189 billion baht in economic losses.

The SROI results found that the public gained 130 baht for every 1 baht that ThaiHealth invested in the campaign.

ThaiHealth's no-smoking campaign spent more than 1.4 billion baht in the same period of time. TDRI estimates the public saved more than 26 billion baht in economic losses caused by smoking-related diseases and lost productivity, thanks to the campaign.

ThaiHealth's consumer protection-related campaigns, including the ban on asbestos, re-used frying oil and contaminated water machines, cost 19 million baht between 2008-2012.

But the campaigns returned more than 3.88 billion baht in benefits to the public, according to the TDRI's findings.

Piya Hanvoravongchai from Chulalongkorn University's Medicine faculty led the research team. He said the research proved that investing in health can benefit society as a whole.

The government must support these kinds of investments, he urged.

However, critics have cast doubt over ThaiHealth's transparency in the

management of its funding, while questioning its effectiveness.

The foundation's funds come from a dedicated 2% tax on tobacco and alcohol sales, bringing in about 3-4 billion baht annually, or 0.75% of total national health expenditure.

TDRI researcher Worawan Chandoevit said it might be too early to fully judge ThaiHealth at this stage.

Several projects funded by ThaiHealth involve behavioral changes, she said. It will take time to see if the campaigns are truly successful.

The organisation would benefit if it provided more information and allowed the public to access its project and financial details, she added.