

# Guideline evaluation and implementation mechanisms in school health services (GuideMe): Protocol for a hybrid randomized factorial trial

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## 26 **Abstract**

### 27 **Background**

28 Norwegian school health services received a national best-practice guideline in 2017. To promote  
29 healthy life skills and identify adolescents needing support, the guideline includes strong  
30 recommendations for individual consultations with all 8th graders and increased collaboration with  
31 schools. To help implement the recommendations, a blended implementation strategy (SchoolHealth)  
32 was co-created with school nurses, students, and stakeholders. SchoolHealth consists of three  
33 implementation elements: Digital dialog and administration tool (audit and feedback+), Dialog support  
34 (external consultation), and Collaboration materials (targeted dissemination). This hybrid study will  
35 test the main and combined effects of the elements on guideline fidelity and effectiveness.

### 36 **Methods**

37 The GuideMe study is a factorial cluster randomized controlled trial examining SchoolHealth's  
38 effectiveness on guideline fidelity and guideline effectiveness goals. Forty Norwegian secondary  
39 schools will be randomized to eight different combinations of the elements in SchoolHealth.  
40 Participants will include school nurses and school personnel from these schools, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students  
41 ( $n=1200$ ). Primary outcomes are school nurses' fidelity to the guidelines and student's ability to cope  
42 with their life (i.e., health literacy, positive health behaviors and self-efficacy). Quantitative methods  
43 will be used to test effects and mechanisms, while mixed- and qualitative methods will be used to  
44 explore mechanisms, experiences, and other phenomena in depth. Participants will complete digital  
45 questionnaires at the start and end of the schoolyear, and after the consultation during the schoolyear.  
46 The study will run in two waves, each lasting for one school year. The multifactorial design allows  
47 testing of interactions and main effects due to equal distribution of all factors within each main effect.  
48 Sustainment and scale-up of optimized SchoolHealth elements using national infrastructure are  
49 simultaneously prepared.

### 50 **Discussion**

51 The study will investigate possible effects of the implementation elements in isolation and in  
52 combination, and hypothesized implementation mechanisms. In-depth study of user experiences will

53 inform improvements to elements in SchoolHealth. The results will yield causal knowledge about  
54 implementation strategies and the mechanisms through which they assert effects. Mixed-methods will  
55 provide insights into how and when the elements work. Optimizing guideline implementation  
56 elements can support adolescents in a crucial life phase.

57

58 **Trail registration**

59 ISRCTN reg.nr. 24173836

60 Registration date 08.08.2022

61

62 **Keywords**

63 Implementation strategies, Implementation mechanisms, Guideline, School health services, EPIS,

64 Multifactorial design, Hybrid study

## 65 **Introduction**

66 The Norwegian Directorate of Health launched a new national guideline for school health services in  
67 2017. The guideline's aim is to promote service quality and sustainability, with less unwanted variation  
68 in practices and more coherent service pathways for students. The guideline strongly recommends  
69 individual health-promoting consultations with all 8<sup>th</sup> graders, aiming to improve the students' ability  
70 to cope with life and to thrive by increasing health literacy, promoting positive health behaviors and  
71 self-efficacy, and identifying students needing follow-up. The recommendations emphasize  
72 empowering students in consultations and focusing on their needs. The guideline also strongly  
73 recommends interprofessional collaboration with schools to promote quantity and quality of care, and  
74 increase student attendance (1). Although the guidelines are based on evidence and professional  
75 consensus (2), the effects of adhering to the guidelines have not been evaluated.

76 Adolescence is a crucial phase in which future life opportunities and patterns of adult health develop  
77 (3). Therefore, adolescence is important for concurrent and prospective well-being and the economic  
78 development of nations (4). Attending secondary school is free and obligatory in Nordic countries.  
79 Thus, schools provide opportunities to promote positive relationships, healthy behaviors, and  
80 resilience to cope with stressful events regardless of social background. The school health service is a  
81 mandatory part of the municipal health services in Norway. They are located at schools, free of cost  
82 for all students, and have health promotion and prevention as core aims (5).

83 The guideline recommendations are professionally normative. Any service choosing to deviate must  
84 document and justify their choice. However, the guideline is not explicit regarding *how* the school  
85 health services should implement the recommendations and reach their intended goals.

86 Implementation of national guidelines is a struggle across public service sectors (6). Successful  
87 implementation and sustainment rely upon effective strategies appropriately addressing key  
88 implementation determinants and mechanisms across service levels (7, 8). These mechanisms may be  
89 caused by dynamic connections between different elements of implementation (e.g., discrete  
90 implementation strategies, processes, and contextual circumstances; (9)), the guideline being  
91 implemented (e.g., their compatibility and relevance for practice), and the people doing and receiving

92 implementation (e.g., the self-efficacy and capacities of practitioners). Empirical evidence about the  
93 most effective and efficient implementation strategies is scarce (7). Also, implementation strategies  
94 are typically evaluated in packages of several discrete strategies, such as multi-element and blended  
95 strategies (9, 10). Thus, it remains uncertain what different discrete strategies and elements contribute  
96 to effectiveness, how they contribute, and which are likely superfluous (9).

97 Through a human-centered co-creation approach, we developed a guideline implementation tool called  
98 SchoolHealth. The first version, inspired by a Danish equivalent named BørnUngeLiv.dk, has been  
99 found feasible and user-friendly in pilot testing (11). Subsequently, SchoolHealth has been improved  
100 based on pilot results and re-designed into three elements representing discrete implementation  
101 strategies: (1) Digital dialog and administration tool (audit and feedback+), (2) Dialog support  
102 (external consultation), and (3) Collaboration materials (targeted dissemination). The elements  
103 represent complementary implementation strategies tailored to facilitate the implementation of the  
104 guideline with fidelity and help services reach the guidelines' intended goals. An important aspect of  
105 achieving the guideline goals is ensuring appropriate user pathways for adolescents in health services.  
106 However, how adolescents with health vulnerabilities are handled in the healthcare system is largely  
107 unknown (12), including the role of school health services in identifying follow-up needs.

108

### 109 **The current study**

110 The overall objectives of the GuideMe study are to help the school health services implement the  
111 guideline recommendations and reach their goals, and simultaneously increase scientific knowledge  
112 about effective implementation strategies and health service use among students.

113 We will conduct a hybrid cluster randomized factorial experiment to evaluate and optimize the  
114 effectiveness of SchoolHealth. Quantitative-, qualitative-, and mixed- methods will be used to evaluate  
115 the main and combined effects of the three implementation elements on fidelity to the guideline,  
116 school and student outcomes (guideline goals), and investigate mechanisms of change and user  
117 experiences. Baseline data will be complemented with epidemiological studies and registry data to  
118 study students' health service use in Norway. Additionally, we will prepare for system-wide scale-up

119 of the optimized version of SchoolHealth by developing solution designs for national infrastructure.

120 The study will investigate the following research questions:

121

122 1. What are the main and combined effects of the implementation elements in SchoolHealth on  
123 fidelity to the guideline recommendations for:

124 a. The individual 8<sup>th</sup>-grade consultations with students.

125 b. School health services collaboration with schools.

126

127 2. i) What are the main and combined effects of the implementation elements in SchoolHealth  
128 on:

129 a. Identification of vulnerable students in need of follow-up.

130 b. Students' health literacy, health behaviors, self-efficacy, quality of life, school  
131 environment, and attendance?

132 c. Students' involvement in the 8<sup>th</sup>-grade consultations?

133 ii) How are effects associated with school nurses' fidelity to recommendations?

134

135 3. i) What are the main and combined effects of the implementation elements in SchoolHealth  
136 on:

137 a. Interprofessional collaboration.

138 b. School nurses' work-related self-efficacy and relation with students?

139 ii) How are effects associated with school nurses' fidelity to recommendations?

140

141 4. Through what mechanisms do implementation elements assert their influence on  
142 implementation outcomes, and how?

143 a. How do individual and contextual implementation determinants influence fidelity and  
144 effects?

145 5. What are the participants' experiences with SchoolHealth?



- 146 a. School nurses' experiences with the elements in SchoolHealth, 8<sup>th</sup>-grade consultations,  
147 and collaboration with schools.
- 148 b. Teachers' experiences with interprofessional collaboration.
- 149 c. Students' experiences with the 8<sup>th</sup>-grade consultation and perspectives on health  
150 literacy and quality of life.
- 151 d. Experiences in Norway compared to the Danish equivalent.
- 152
- 153 6. What are the associations between self-reported health status in adolescence and user  
154 pathways in health- and welfare services?
- 155

## 156 **Methods**

### 157 **Study setting**

158 The study setting is Norwegian lower-secondary schools and school health services. The Norwegian  
159 school system is mainly public. The first ten years are compulsory, and all who have completed  
160 compulsory schooling are granted the right to three to four years of free upper-secondary education.

161 The school health service in Norway is part of the primary municipal health care services. The service  
162 aims to promote good health and prevent disease. They work on individual, group, and universal  
163 levels. The resources and structures of the services, as well as what they offer, vary substantially  
164 between municipalities (13, 14).

### 165 **Participants**

166 This multicenter study will collect data from 8<sup>th</sup>-grade students, school nurses, their leaders, and  
167 school personnel from several municipalities in southeast and central Norway, representing both rural  
168 and urban areas. Participating schools choose which 8<sup>th</sup>-grade classes (1-3 classes) to include. All  
169 students in the participating classes will then be invited. The data-collection period will last for two  
170 school years (2022/23 and 2023/24, see Figure 1).

171 **Figure 1:** Participants and data-collection period

172

173 **Intervention: Evidence-based Guideline**

174 8th Grade Consultations

175 The recommendations for individual consultations with 8<sup>th</sup> graders are built on legislation, evidence,  
176 and professional consensus (2). The consultation should be health-promoting based on the students'  
177 needs, include weighing and height measuring, and address topics related to health behaviors (sleep,  
178 diet, physical activity), physical and mental health, social relationships, family, sexuality, dental  
179 health, drugs, violence, abuse, and neglect. The estimated consultation timeframe is 30 minutes.  
180 Before the consultation, the school nurses should familiarize themselves with the students' health  
181 records and must document the consultation in this record. The school nurse is expected to conduct  
182 follow-up consultations, initiate interprofessional collaboration, or refer students to other professionals  
183 when necessary.

184 Collaboration Between School Health Services and Schools

185 The guideline encompasses twelve recommendations on collaboration between school health services  
186 and schools, all marked as strong recommendations or legislative requirements (1). The  
187 recommendations include system-oriented collaboration, monitoring students' health status,  
188 contributing to health education in groups and school classes, facilitating visits to adolescent health  
189 centers, providing health information in parent meetings, and follow-up of students' school absences.  
190 The collaboration should be systematically planned and organized.

191 **Implementation Strategies**

192 Table 1 specifies the experimental implementation elements per recommendations for reporting  
193 implementation strategies (The TIDieR Checklist ; (15)). The following describes SchoolHealth and  
194 the content of each strategy and its target functions.

195 Audit and Feedback+ (Digital Feedback and Administration Tool [DFA])

196 DFA is the only element that involves the students directly. School nurses/teachers administer a digital  
197 health information form to students before their 8<sup>th</sup>-grade consultation. The topics in the form are  
198 based on the recommended topics in the guideline. Filling out a health form may empower students  
199 through preparing topics they can bring up in the consultation and the opportunity to reflect upon

200 topics important to them. The school nurse will receive an *individual feedback report*, with the main  
201 aim to support school nurses in tailoring consultations to individual needs, thus increasing nurses'  
202 capability, opportunity, and motivation to use the 8<sup>th</sup>-grade consultation recommendations. It may also  
203 help identify students in need of additional support and follow-up. After the 8<sup>th</sup>-grade consultation, the  
204 students and the school nurses answer questions regarding the consultation. The students report user  
205 satisfaction, including relation with the school nurse and involvement in consultation, generating the  
206 *user satisfaction report*. The school nurse and the students answer questions about the content of the  
207 consultation (fidelity to guideline), generating the *8<sup>th</sup>-grade consultation report*. Both reports will be  
208 available for the school nurse and their service leaders on the DFA platform. Additionally, the DFA  
209 platform include a *school report*, an aggregated summary based on all the students' pre-consultation  
210 health information forms. Here, school health nurses and leaders can compare their schools/districts  
211 aggregated answers with that of others in the study. The school report covers topics highlighted in the  
212 guideline recommendations on which the school health service and schools should collaborate.

213

#### 214 Ongoing Consultation (Dialog Support)

215 Dialog Support aims to increase school nurses' capability, opportunity, and motivation to adhere to the  
216 guideline recommendation for 8<sup>th</sup>-grade consultations with fidelity and to increase their self-efficacy  
217 toward this consultation. The strategy includes an e-learning module and ongoing consultations. The  
218 e-learning has two main sections on theory and instructional videos about conducting health-  
219 promoting 8<sup>th</sup>-grade consultations. The first section provides health-promoting theories (salutogenesis,  
220 health literacy, empowerment, and user participation). The next section encompasses communication  
221 (starting, conducting, and ending conversations, (16)). The ongoing consultations will include training  
222 in conducting and reflections about the 8<sup>th</sup>-grade consultations. The consultations will be modeled  
223 after the Reflexive teams approach (17), aiming to provide a space for case reflection, problem-  
224 solving, and collegial support. They will be conducted in-person and digitally (hybrid format) and  
225 consist of four meetings.

226 Targeted Dissemination (Collaboration Materials)  
227 Collaboration Materials is the only element that involves school personnel directly. The element is  
228 labeled an active dissemination strategy because a web-based package with educational and  
229 organizational materials and resources is actively provided to teachers, head teachers, and school  
230 nurses. The main aim of the dissemination is to improve and structure interprofessional collaboration.  
231 The element consists of four digital modules with short educational videos, reflection tasks, and a final  
232 summary module. The element will be introduced at a kick-off meeting, and participants will be  
233 encouraged to plan how to implement the modules during one school year. The project staff does not  
234 engage in this.

235 Each module is estimated to last approximately 60 minutes, and the topics are based on what is  
236 considered important to promote interprofessional collaboration and support (18). The topics are: (1)  
237 Conditions for systematic and interprofessional collaboration at different levels of intervention (2),  
238 Overlapping topics in the National curriculum for schools and the Guideline for school health services,  
239 (3) Available resources and supports for evidence-based interventions and utilization of existing data,  
240 and (4) Interprofessional communication – identification of barriers and facilitators, (5) exchange  
241 experiences and plan further collaboration.

242 **Table 1.** Specification of experimental implementation elements

243 **Design**

244 The study is a hybrid type 2 trial, studying both fidelity to guidelines and guideline effects using: (i) a  
245 cluster randomized factorial experiment, ii) hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative methods, and  
246 (iii) convergent and sequential mixed-methods. To study health service use in Norwegian adolescent,  
247 survey data will be linked with national registers (iv).

248 The randomized factorial experiment (i)

249 We will employ a stratified, randomized cluster factorial design to evaluate the effects of the three  
250 implementation elements separately and in different combinations. The schools will be randomized to  
251 one of eight different experimental conditions.

252 The factors in Table 2 reflect the three previously described elements. The three elements are  
253 complementary, and together (yes/yes/yes) represent a blended implementation strategy that, in theory,  
254 should elicit the strongest outcomes based on an additivity or ecology principle (i.e., effects of  
255 implementation strategies are the sum of their parts or more than the sum of their parts, (9). However,  
256 these implementation elements have rarely been evaluated independently or together. The  
257 multifactorial design allows for the testing of interactions and main effects due to the equal  
258 distribution of all factors within each main effect.

259 **Table 2.** Experimental conditions in the factorial experiment

260 *Statistical methods (i)*

261 Primarily, linear mixed-effects models will be used to investigate the implementation elements' main-  
262 and interaction effects on fidelity to the guideline recommendations and guideline goals. In addition, a  
263 stepwise theory-informed strategy will be used to explore the effect of implementation determinants.

264 To investigate psychometric properties, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses will be  
265 performed on instruments with sufficient respondents (primarily instruments administered to students).

266 For all instruments, correlations between subscales will be computed using Pearson's r and other  
267 relevant statistics. Internal consistency for the scales and subscales will be investigated using  
268 Cronbach's alpha and other relevant statistics.

269 *Hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative methods (ii)*

270 We will use a hermeneutic-phenomenological qualitative approach (19) to explore the experiences of  
271 students, school nurses, and school personnel. We use hermeneutic phenomenology to explore and  
272 interpret phenomena as understood and formulated by the participants (20, 21).

273 Qualitative individual and focus group interviews will be used to gain in-depth knowledge of central  
274 phenomena and user experiences (21, 22). Qualitative analyses of meaning content will be carried out  
275 by informed models for qualitative analyses as described by e.g., Kvale and Brinkmann (21), Van  
276 Manen (20), and Braun and Clarke (23).

277 *Qualitative interview*

278 All interviews will be semi-structured. Guides for individual interviews with students and school  
279 nurses contain 4-5 predetermined themes with follow-up questions, and permit an open dialog.

280 Students are interviewed about their experiences with the 8<sup>th</sup>-grade consultation, relation to the school  
281 nurse, health literacy, quality of life, and coping. School nurses' individual interviews touch upon their  
282 experiences with coping during the 8<sup>th</sup>-grade consultation, student relations, and how to identify and  
283 follow up students with additional needs.

284 The guide for focus group interviews with school nurses is made with the opportunity to add themes  
285 related to implementation after preliminary quantitative data analyses (see mixed-methods). The  
286 complete interview guide covers themes such as experiences with the 8<sup>th</sup>-grade consultation,  
287 collaboration with school, national guidelines, implementation of the elements, and determinants for  
288 implementation. School personnel are interviewed on three main topics regarding the nature, content,  
289 and quality of collaboration with school health services. In addition, they are asked about experiences  
290 with implementing SchoolHealth and relevant implementation determinants.

291 *Mixed-methods (iii)*

292 A mixed-methods experimental design (convergent and sequential (24)), from a pluralistic and meta-  
293 paradigmatic perspective (25), will be used to investigate experiences with the different  
294 implementation elements and the complexity of implementation mechanisms across conditions. We  
295 will corroborate quantitative and qualitative data on the value of, and experiences with, the  
296 implementation elements and the guideline recommendations. Qualitative data will provide a more in-  
297 depth understanding of findings from different viewpoints. According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (26),  
298 mixed methods research involves seeing qualitative and quantitative data as two different ends of a  
299 continuum, where one moves seamlessly across it to pursue optimal answers to the different research  
300 questions of the study. This means that the different data sources will be given different weights and  
301 priorities throughout the analytical process to best answer the research question. Thus, the sequential  
302 dimension of the design will include conducting preliminary analyses of quantitative data about

303 implementation determinants, fidelity, and collaboration after each data collection wave to inform  
304 themes and questions for the qualitative interviews.

305 Student data and national data registers (iv)

306 We will compare baseline data from GuideMe on health and health service use with cross-sectional  
307 data from wave 4 of the adolescent part of the Young-HUNT Study (27), a Norwegian population-  
308 based study in Central Norway (28, 29). In the Young-HUNT wave 4 survey there were 8066 (76% of  
309 the invited) 13–19-year-old participants. Data from GuideMe and Young-HUNT4 will also be linked  
310 with national registry data on healthcare service use (The Norwegian Registry for Primary Health Care  
311 (KPR) and the Norwegian Patient Registry (NPR)(30).

312 Health and health service use among participants in both studies will be assessed and compared.

313 Subgroup analyses will be conducted to test whether demographics (e.g., gender, socioeconomic  
314 status, schools) affect associations between health measures (e.g., mental health, medical conditions,  
315 health behavior).

## 316 **Outcomes**

317 The study uses the Exploration, Preparation, Implementation, and Sustainment Framework EPIS (31)  
318 as a theoretical framework for investigating implementation as multilevel processes influenced by  
319 innovation factors, the outer and inner implementation context, and the interplay between factors (i.e.,  
320 bridging factors) across four phases of implementation (32). Due to the highly autonomous and  
321 individual nature of school nurses' practice settings, we complement EPIS with the Capabilities,  
322 Opportunities, and Motivation model of Behavior change (COM-B)(33)) to inform explorations of  
323 how and why implementation strategies influence school nurses' fidelity to guidelines. EPIS and  
324 COM-B have informed the development of studies' theories of change and hypotheses for how the  
325 implementation strategies influence fidelity to guidelines and guideline effects (see Figure 2 for logic  
326 model). EPIS has informed measurements of organizational and individual-level implementation  
327 determinants and focus group interviews. COM-B has informed measures of individual-level  
328 determinants of behavior change and individual interviews.

329 **Figure 2.:** Logic model depicting a simplification of the theorized relationships between the guideline  
330 recommendations, implementation elements, determinants, and proximal and medial outcomes.

331 The outcomes are operationalized and described in Table 3 by measurements, data collection method,  
332 informant, and timepoint. Details about the measurement instruments, including psychometric  
333 properties and validations, are in Supplementary file 1.

334 **Table 3.:** Outcomes and measures, measurements, method of data collection, informant, and timepoint  
335 for each measure in the factorial experiment

336 Implementation outcomes (proximal)

337 Fidelity to guidelines will be assessed through items encompassing the three constructs adherence to  
338 guidelines, adaptations to guidelines, and quality in using guidelines. *Adherence to guidelines* is  
339 conceptualized as adhering to specific key recommendations for how to carry out the 8<sup>th</sup>-grade  
340 consultation and collaboration with schools. Measurement of 8<sup>th</sup>-grade consultation adherence include  
341 items about whether health information was adapted to the student, and focus on habits important to  
342 promote good health. Additionally, checklist items about themes addressed and registering height and  
343 weight also index adherence. Collaboration adherence is measured with questions about how the  
344 collaboration is organized (formal and informal meetings), whether school nurses participated in any  
345 of the schools' planning hours or meetings, and topics on which the school and school nurses are  
346 supposed to collaborate and how they collaborate.

347 The *dosage* of 8<sup>th</sup> grade consultation will be measured by the time used on the consultation, and the  
348 dosage of collaboration by the number of scheduled meetings.

349 *Quality in using the 8<sup>th</sup>-grade consultation guidelines* is indexed by post-consultation measures of  
350 school nurses' and students' perceptions of their alliance and achievement of the guidelines' core  
351 functions, such as empowerment, reinforcement of positive health behavior, and identification of  
352 follow-up needs. *Quality in using collaboration guidelines* is indexed by measuring perceptions of  
353 achievement of the core functions of collaboration guidelines, such as common values and



354 understanding, role and responsibility clarification, ease of contact with each other, knowledge about  
355 each other's competence and regulations, mutual respect, and structure.

356 School nurses report *adaptations to consultation* through open-ended questions in the post-  
357 consultation questionnaire (T2). Adaptations will be retrospectively coded using the FRAME-IS  
358 framework for adaptations (34), labeled fidelity-consistent (positive) or fidelity-inconsistent  
359 (negative). The labeling will be based on a qualitative judgment of whether the adaptation was likely  
360 to maintain the core function of the recommendation in our theory of change (fidelity-consistent) or  
361 not (35). The qualitative judgment will also be informed by the measures of quality. Qualitative  
362 interviews with school nurses and school personnel will explore adaptation to collaboration guidelines.

363 Health and Service Outcomes (medial)

364 The effectiveness of SchoolHealth on guideline recommendation goals will be measured through  
365 students' health and service outcomes (Table 3) (58-60) relevant to the guideline goals.

366 *Identification of vulnerable students* in need of follow-up will be captured qualitatively and assessed  
367 quantitatively through school nurses' evaluation of students' physical, psychological, and social  
368 functioning, registration of follow-up group, the number of follow-ups during the school year, and the  
369 student's self-reported mental health (SDQ) (36).

370 Students' health outcomes will be assessed by *somatic symptoms* (CSSI-8) (37), *quality of life*  
371 (Kidscreen-27) (38, 56), *self-efficacy* (GSE-5) (39, 40), and *health literacy* (HLSAC) (41) at the start  
372 (T1) and end of the school year (T3). Health literacy and self-efficacy will also be measured post-  
373 consultation (T2), and health literacy will be explored qualitatively. Students will assess their *health*  
374 *behaviors* through items on behaviors of sleep, physical activity, nutrition, and screen time activities.

375 Students' assessments of *School environment and attendance* will be measured through a mix of self-  
376 developed questions and questions used in similar studies (57, see supplementary file 1 for details).

377 *User satisfaction* is an overall assessment of students' experiences (qualitatively) and degree of user  
378 satisfaction and empowerment in consultation (quantitatively). It includes items of involvement in  
379 consultations (like being heard and talking about what matters to them) and student-school nurse

380 alliance, informed by both students and school nurses. The items are partly self-developed, inspired by  
381 similar scales (42, 43).

382 School nurses and school personnel will assess *interprofessional collaboration* between the school and  
383 school nurse (44). School nurses will complete an assessment on their work-related self-efficacy using  
384 an adjusted version (45) of the GSE-5 (40).

#### 385 Determinants

386 *Implementation determinants* will be measured to investigate their influence on fidelity to guidelines  
387 and guideline effects. These include school nurses' and leaders' assessments of implementation climate  
388 (ICS) (46, 58-60), implementation leadership (ILS) (47, 61), implementability of guidelines (FIM,  
389 AIM, IAM) (48), fidelity to implementation elements, implementation capacity (qualitative  
390 interviews), and school nurses' work-related self-efficacy (GSE-5) (45).

391 *Background variables* will be collected from school nurses and teachers regarding age, gender,  
392 education, and years of work experience. Additionally, context characteristics will be assessed by  
393 school nurses. Students' assessment of *demographics* includes items on socioeconomic status, gender,  
394 and ethnicity. Other student-determinants will be assessed by mental health (SDQ) (36), self-efficacy  
395 (GSE-5) (40, 62), and user satisfaction as described under Health and Service Outcomes.

#### 396 Health data and linkage with national registers

397 Student questionnaires in GuideMe and the Young-HUNT4 Survey cover overlapping topics and  
398 identical instruments, subscales, or items. Both include for example the SDQ, items about general  
399 health and quality of life, health care use, and health behavior.

400 From the national registers, data on socioeconomic status, along with use of the school health services  
401 (KPR), general practitioners (KPR), physiotherapists (KPR), and specialized healthcare services  
402 (including psychiatric care) (NPR) will be linked to GuideMe data.

#### 403 **Recruitment**

404 The schools and school health services will be invited mainly through a convenience sampling  
405 approach.

406 **School health services**

407 Recruitment of school health services will be done through oral and written information and meetings  
408 with the leaders of the services. Additionally, written information will be provided to administrative  
409 leaders of the local municipalities.

410 **Schools**

411 Two different approaches will be used to invite schools: (1) After the school health services have  
412 agreed to participate or (2) simultaneously. A brief description of the study will be sent to the school  
413 leaders, with an invitation to attend an information meeting. The study will then be presented to the  
414 school principals and the school health services in each location. The interested schools will be asked  
415 to nominate a key contact person. School health services and schools agreeing to participate sign a  
416 cooperation agreement.

417 **8<sup>th</sup> grade students**

418 Students in the participating classes and their parents will be introduced to the study via class visits by  
419 school nurses and parent meetings. The schools will provide parents with written information and a  
420 link to a digital informed consent form, including a voluntary option for providing the second parents'  
421 e-mail so that s/he can get information that the parent has consented to the student participating in the  
422 study. For students to participate in the study, at least one of the parents must complete an electronic  
423 consent form. The students will be given age-appropriate written and animated information at school.  
424 The students will consent to participate by filling in the questionnaire. A project webpage  
425 (<https://guideme.rbup.no/en>) is developed to enhance communication with all participants.

426 The recruitment of participants will be reported per the Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials  
427 (CONSORT) guidelines for clustered randomized trials.

428 **Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

429 Inclusion criteria are students who agree to participate, have informed consent from one of their  
430 parents, and are able to answer the web-based questionnaires.

431 The main exclusion criteria are intellectual disability or language problems, defined as not being able  
432 to complete the questionnaires. In addition, long-term school absenteeism may also be an exclusion  
433 criterion but will be considered individually. The reasons for exclusion will be documented in the  
434 Consort flowchart.

### 435 **Randomization in the factorial experiment (i)**

436 The schools will be randomly assigned to test different combinations of the three implementation  
437 elements in SchoolHealth. The school randomization procedure will be carried out in R using a  
438 function specifically written for the GuideMe study. The function is developed by a statistician in  
439 collaboration with key personnel in the project and will be witnessed by an objective third party. The  
440 schools will be randomized to one of the eight experimental conditions (see Table 2).

### 441 **Power analysis and sample size in the factorial experiment (i)**

442 An R-package called MOST developed for power analyses in factorial trials will be used (see  
443 supplementary file 2 for R-script). When conducting a factorial trial, one option for specifying effect  
444 size for power calculation is deciding the smallest effect of practical interest (49). This can be decided  
445 using Cohen's rule of thumb (50).

446 We selected the following statistical attributes:  $\alpha = 0.05$ , an effect size of  $d = 0.15$ , and statistical  
447 power of 0.80 ( $\beta = 0.20$ ). Being a cluster trial, the design effect may affect our power calculation.  
448 Thus, an intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) of 0.05 and an average size of clusters = 30 (SD=15)  
449 was also accounted for (51). The results from the power calculations indicated that 36 schools and  
450 1080 students were needed in the study. To account for possible dropout and the need for subgroup  
451 analyses, we aim to recruit approximately 40 schools and 1200 students.

### 452 **Participants in Qualitative interviews (ii and iii)**

453 The qualitative data will be collected in both waves (Figure 1). We will conduct individual interviews  
454 with 24 students and 12 school nurses, and focus group interviews with 12-24 school nurses, 12-24  
455 teachers, and 6-12 school leaders. Variations in the experimental condition and geographic region will  
456 be emphasized when inviting participants to facilitate representativeness. The selection of students for  
457 qualitative interviews will be stratified (52). When schools are selected, school nurses will provide

458 names for students that fit pre-defined criteria regarding gender (boys/girls), quality of conversation in  
459 8<sup>th</sup>-grade consultation (good/difficult), and cultural background (Norwegian/second culture).

460 School nurses, school personnel, and school leaders will be recruited through purposive availability  
461 sampling, emphasizing the participants' ability to elucidate a specific theme (53). All participating  
462 nurses will be invited due to the limited number of participants and the large number of conditions.

463 School personnel and leaders will be recruited to ensure representativeness to different experimental  
464 conditions, particularly element 3, Collaboration materials, due to their active role in this condition.

465 In Denmark, interviews with school nurses and teams implementing BørnUngeLiv.dk will be  
466 conducted. The main aim is to compare SchoolHealth with the Danish equivalent.

467 All interviews will be digitally audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

## 468 **Implementation of SchoolHealth**

469 Quality assurance/Monitoring

470 We will monitor implementation quality by measuring implementation fidelity to ensure validity in  
471 experimental conditions. We conceptualize implementation fidelity similarly to guideline fidelity (25).

472 Measures of implementation fidelity are designed to index whether implementation in each condition  
473 is conducted as planned (e.g., content, structure, dosage, materials, absentees, turnover), whether any  
474 adaptations are fidelity consistent (done to maintain core functions in our theory of change) or fidelity  
475 inconsistent (drifting away in a manner unlikely to maintain core functions), and whether proximal  
476 functions of the implementation (e.g., increased self-efficacy related to using guidelines).

477 Measures of fidelity to implementation elements

478 To index fidelity to implementation elements, school nurses and school personnel will answer  
479 questions about the completion and quality of each element:

480 *Adherence and adaptations* will be assessed using questions at T3 about training and support received  
481 during the study. *Satisfaction* will be assessed by asking how satisfied s/he was with the elements in  
482 SchoolHealth, and whether s/he would recommend them to a colleague. To assess *functions*, we will  
483 analyze the change in self-efficacy and collaboration adherence from pre to post. The school nurses

484 will also be asked whether and how the elements helped them carry out the 8<sup>th</sup>-grade consultation and  
485 cooperate with schools. School personnel in element 3 will be asked whether and how the material  
486 helped them cooperate with the school health services and how many collaboration meetings they  
487 completed.

488 In addition, project coordinators register information about implementation in all experimental  
489 conditions. For training and consultations, the following will be registered: attendance, time spent,  
490 content completed, significant events, adaptations to plans, adherence. For technical assistance  
491 requested during the study that is of relevance to experimental conditions, the following will be  
492 registered: participant, time spent, content/issue, significant events, turnover/sick leaves, and other  
493 adaptations.

#### 494 **Sustainment and scaling**

495 Planning and preparing for sustainment and scale-up have been part of the co-creation process from  
496 the start of the exploration phase of the study. The projects' collaboration with key stakeholders,  
497 institutions educating health nurses, and authorities lays the foundation for using national  
498 infrastructure and regional competence centers (RBUP and RKBU) in scaling up.

499 The Norwegian Healthnet serves as a hub for developing a plan for sustainment and scale of functions  
500 in the DFA. This partnership provides a fruitful platform for designing, establishing, and testing secure  
501 data collection directly from users by means of Helsenorge.no, the digital platform for user interaction  
502 between citizens and patients with health services and registries.

503 Should the ongoing consultation (Dialog support) be a significant contributor to important  
504 implementation mechanisms and effects, we will plan for further improvements, sustainment, and  
505 scale by establishing an implementation group at the national competence centers involved in the  
506 study. Also, a protocol describing the structure, methods, and content of the ongoing consultations will  
507 be developed and made nationally available for other institutions to adopt. The e-learning module will  
508 be made accessible for educational purposes to the master's programs in public health nursing and will  
509 serve as a resource for the clinical practice of public health nursing.

510 If the results indicate that Collaboration material provides value, the material will be further improved  
511 based on participant feedback. RBUP and RKBU will offer schools and school health services an  
512 introduction and access to the revised material, which will be included as part of RBUP and RKBU  
513 Central Norway's ordinary teaching- and service provision.

514 In summary, each element in SchoolHealth can be sustained and scaled independently of the other, or  
515 in more ecological combinations. The results of the study will inform decisions regarding plans and  
516 recommendations for sustainment and scale.

### 517 **Dissemination of results**

518 Results will be disseminated through scientific publications, the study's and collaborating institutions'  
519 webpages, seminars with school health services and schools, popular science publications, and press  
520 releases. Research fellows, who are part of the project team, will publish and publicly defend  
521 dissertations related to the study. Master students will also publish results from the study. Planned  
522 scientific publications include reporting results on primary outcomes, secondary outcomes,  
523 psychometrics, and implementation mechanisms. The project team determines authorship of scientific  
524 publications in line with the Vancouver Protocol.

### 525 **Discussion**

526 This hybrid type 2 study can optimize large-scale strategies for implementing evidence-based  
527 guideline recommendations in school health services to improve students' health literacy, positive  
528 health behaviors, identify students needing follow-up, and improve interprofessional collaboration.  
529 The study "deconstructs" a blended implementation strategy that has been co-created with a wide array  
530 of relevant stakeholders and partners into its smaller meaningful parts (i.e., implementation elements),  
531 which represents three human-centered discrete implementation strategies (audit and feedback+,  
532 ongoing consultations, and active dissemination). The multifactorial design allows testing the effects  
533 of the elements in isolation and all possible combinations, as well as testing hypothesized  
534 implementation mechanisms informed by theory. By combining methods from multiple paradigms  
535 (i.e., factorial design, pluralistic mixed-methods, phenomenology), we can investigate cause and  
536 effects, mechanisms, and value from the perspectives of complementary causal theories and the lived

537 experience of participants. This will allow us also to explore narratives about how, when, and for  
538 whom value do or do not occur or emerge from the implementation strategies and use of guideline  
539 recommendations. The study also addresses the degree of guideline fidelity needed for intended effects  
540 to occur. Investigations as outlined above have been extensively called for to advance implementation  
541 science (7, 9, 54, 55).

542 The study evaluates an innovative digitalization effort co-developed to meet expressed needs of users  
543 and services. It will also extend knowledge on adolescents' service use and user-pathways important  
544 for developing youth-friendly human-centered models of primary care.



545 **Declarations**

546 **Ethics evaluation and consent to participate**

547 The study was reported to the Norwegian Regional Committees for Medical and Health Research  
548 Ethics for approval. They concluded that the project falls outside the scope of the Norwegian Health  
549 Research Act, cf. § 2, and can be carried out without their approval. The study follows Norwegian  
550 procedures for ethical evaluation, and will be performed in line with the Norwegian ethical guidelines  
551 for research (<https://www.forskningsetikk.no/en/guidelines/general-guidelines/>). The data protection  
552 is evaluated by Sikt – The Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research.

553 Informed consent will be obtained from all participants. We anticipate a low risk of harm for  
554 participants, as SchoolHealth primarily aims to support school nurses and school personnel in their  
555 ordinary practice.

556 RBUP East and South and the collaborating partners have developed and signed an agreement on joint  
557 data processing responsibility.

558 **Consent for publication**

559 Not applicable

560 **Availability of data and materials**

561 Not applicable

562 **Competing interests**

563 The authors declare that they have no competing interests. None of the participating authors have  
564 competing interests related to the publication of this protocol.

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568 through personnel resources.

569 **Authors' contributions**

570 ÅS is the principal investigator of the study.

571 ÅS, SH, AA, AT, LS, SE, KG and AJ are involved in the execution/weekly follow-up of the project.  
572 ÅS, SH, TE, MB, SE, HS, KG, AJ, KP and KK are involved in the evaluation of the project.  
573 ÅS, SH, KG, MB, SE, AJ and TE have been involved in the development of the implementation  
574 strategies (SchoolHealth).  
575 ÅS, SH, TE, MB, KG, HS and SE have been involved in the choice and refinement of assessments and  
576 defining mechanisms.  
577 ÅS, SH, TE, HS and SE have been involved in the design of the study.  
578 Funding acquisition was done by ÅS, SH, TE and AJ.  
579 ÅS, TE, MB, and SH have written the first draft of the manuscript.  
580 The authors have been involved in revising the manuscript and given final approval of the version  
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593 SchoolHealth.

## 594 **Supplementary file 1**

595 Outcome and measurement instrument information.

## 596 **Supplementary file 2:**

597 R-script – Power calculations

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# Figures

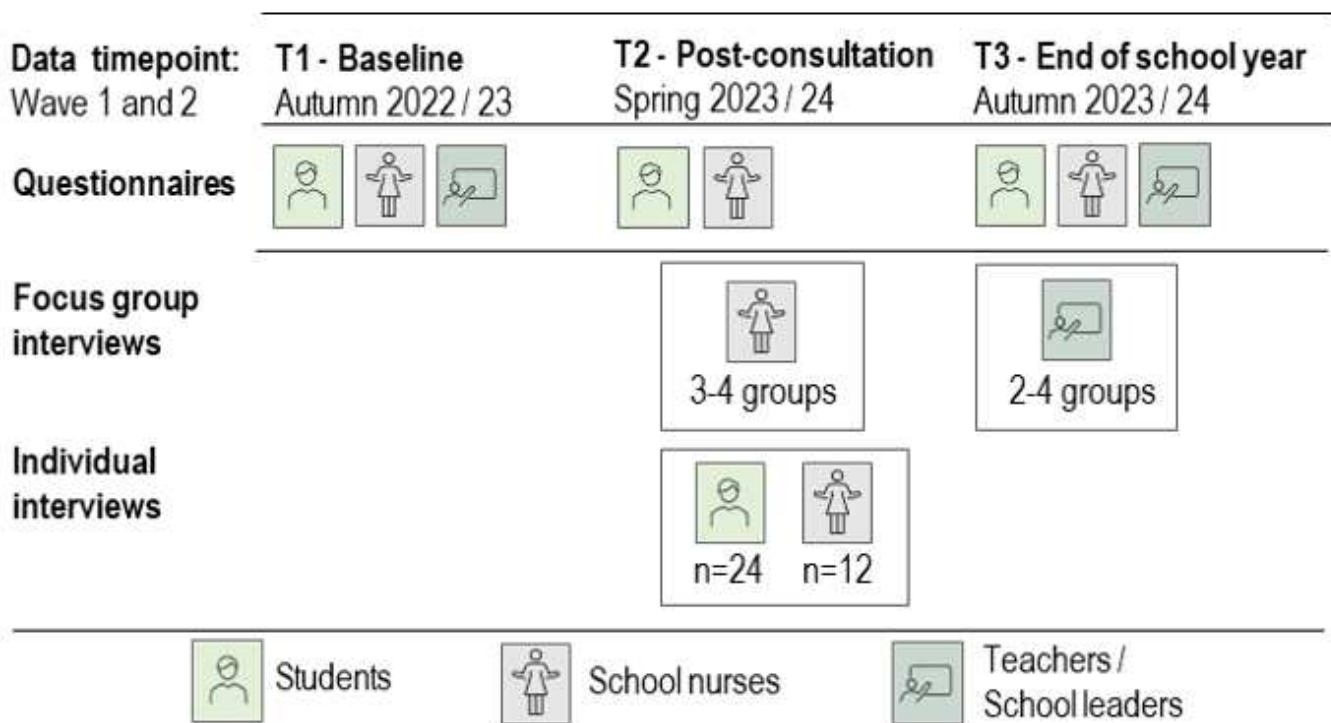
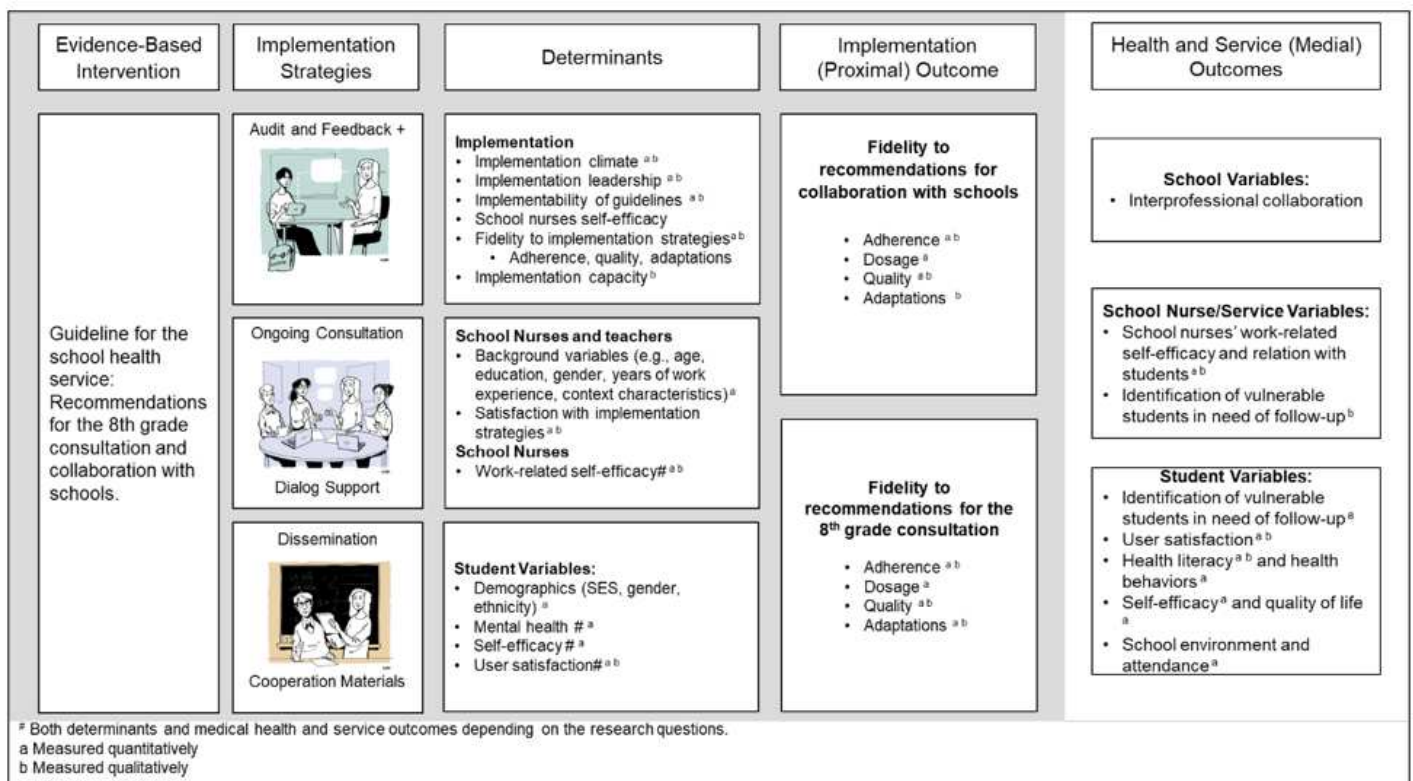


Figure 1

Participants and data-collection period



## Figure 2

Logic model depicting a simplification of the theorized relationships between the guideline recommendations, implementation elements, determinants, and proximal and medial outcomes.

## Supplementary Files

This is a list of supplementary files associated with this preprint. Click to download.

- [Table1GuideMe.docx](#)
- [Table2GuideMe.docx](#)
- [Table3GuideMe.docx](#)
- [Supplementaryfile1OutcomeGuideMe.docx](#)
- [Supplementaryfile2PowercalculationsGuideMe.docx](#)