

MEMORANDUM ON FUTURE EU ACTION ON MENTAL HEALTH

Statement put forward by the Czech Republic EU Presidency conference

Resilient Mental Health in the EU taking place in Brussels on 14th November 2022

Bearing in mind the ongoing mental health crisis in Europe, this conference welcomes the renewed interest of the EU institutions in this area. The document provides a concrete outline for what should be reflected by the European Commission in the “comprehensive action on mental health” outlined by the European Commission’s President during the last State of the Union speech.

STATE OF PLAY

Amongst the others, the reasons for why mental health should be an EU-level policy priority are as follows:

- Mental ill-health is widespread and increasing in the EU: around 11% of the population is estimated to experience mental ill-health, causing immense suffering for individuals, families, and communities.
- Mental ill-health puts pressure on the health, educational, economic, labour, and social welfare systems across the EU.
- At least 30% of people affected by a severe mental ill-health do not have access to care; the majority do not benefit from effective and proven interventions – while in fact, in many cases, mental ill-health can be prevented, cured, treated, and managed.
- For many mental health diseases, a significant proportion of patients does not respond to the current medical and psychiatric treatment.
- Stigma, prejudice, and discrimination are widespread and have a significant impact on those affected seeking or receiving help and support.
- The COVID-19 pandemic put the spotlight on the need to address mental health like never before; the war in Ukraine

further emphasizes the precious and vulnerable nature of mental health.

- The EU is also confronted with an unprecedented faith in misinformation, irrational beliefs that foster extremism, undermine democracy, and negatively impact mental health.

These challenges are in stark contrast to the fact that the development of new treatment strategies in the field of mental health has slowed in the last two decades. Above all, there is a need to develop methods of prevention and resilience, as well as innovative novel therapies with a rapid onset of effect.

Let us not forget that positive mental health and well-being is a key factor for social cohesion, economic progress, and sustainable development in the European Union.

All Member States are facing the same issues in relation to tackling mental ill-health, both with respect to prevention and health promotion, as well as to the development and implementation of effective and sustainable care provision models. Therefore, it is a matter of strategic interest to foster cooperation, and address mental health jointly.

OVERVIEW OF EU ACTIONS

Over recent years the European Commission has taken various steps to ensure a place for mental health on the EU political agenda; important actions have been taken, such as the 2004 Green Paper ‘Improving the mental health of the population: Towards a strategy on mental health for the European Union’, the 2008 European Pact for Mental Health and Well-being’, the 2013 Joint Action on Mental Health and Well-being and the 2016 EU-Compass for Action on Mental Health and Well-being.



Since 2018, mental health has been addressed as one of the many parts of the European Commission's more general chronic disease agenda; this signified a decrease in visibility of the topic, despite the 2019 Finnish Presidency conclusions, which explicitly called for a comprehensive EU Strategy on Mental Health.

RESILIENT MENTAL HEALTH IN THE EU

Based on this conference, it is recommended that the future EU-level action on mental health should include the following:

A. Mainstreaming: explicitly include mental health in all EU policy areas that have a direct or indirect bearing on mental health, e.g., EU4Health, the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Social Fund, Horizon Europe, the European Semester Process, Actions on Corporate Social Responsibility, Health and Safety in the workplace and the Employment Strategy.

B. Awareness-raising and good practice exchange: ensure and coordinate an effective exchange of information, experience and good practice between relevant stakeholders and Member States. Another option to raise awareness would be to consider designating one of the coming years as the European Year of Mental Health. The 'Healthier Together' initiative includes good practice collection and exchange on mental health; this should become part of the overall initiative on mental health.

C. National action plans: stimulate the development of national action plans on mental health to explore appropriate measures for current and novel interventions, including the medicinal use of psychedelics to ensure that patients with mental health problems have access to high-quality care, including diagnostics, treatments, and rehabilitation. National plans can be also helpful to mutual learning and exchange.

D. Funding: make use of the current EU initiatives (e.g., the EU4Health Programme, the Structural Funds) to fund mental health projects (in line with the overall aims of the initiative) and capacity building.

E. Data collection and monitoring: continue to issue specific calls for research projects addressing mental health in future calls for proposals.

F. Inclusion of people living or involved with mental illness: include relevant stakeholders in the development, monitoring, implementation, and assessment of the future initiative as well as in the relevant EU consultations, fora, and advisory boards.

G. Innovative solutions: implement steps towards an ecosystem that stimulates state-of-the-art research and introduction of novel therapies such as the medicinal use of psychedelics for the benefit of patients, especially those who remain resistant to the standard psychiatric care and treatments. Based on the scientific evidence, EU should strive to become a global regulatory benchmark in this area.

CONCLUSIONS

There are EU-level precedents for the type of EU action as listed above. Given the impact and relevance of mental ill-health on individuals, their families, their communities, and society as a whole, it is imperative that urgent action is taken.

The conference calls for a sustained and structured effort at the EU and national levels. An ambitious effort to ensure sound policy and services development is required now, with the aim of preventing mental ill-health across the board and to improve the quality of life of those living with mental health problems.

Resilient Mental Health in the European Union
Brussels, Belgium
14th November 2022



EU2022.CZ



RESILIENT MENTAL
HEALTH
IN THE EUROPEAN UNION