

Mental health: boost for economic recovery in Europe

Towards a European Implementation Program for Mental Health



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Mental health is an asset for our economy, instead of a burden on Member States' budgets. Although evidence about the impact of ill mental health is now widely available, a comprehensive and inspiring Memorandum to deploy and change European mental health policies and practices is still lacking. At present, the cost-effective way to maximise value of investments in mental health is implementing and using existing knowledge. Therefore, AEIP, AIM, EPHA, GGZ Nederland and MHE, all partners in the *European Alliance for Mental Health in all Policies*, are committed to promote and improve mental health in Europe by jointly promoting a European Implementation Program for Mental Health.

The issue

The mental resilience of individuals and communities determine the future of all persons living in Europe, the European economy and European society in general:

- well-educated children, productive adults and active senior citizens increase the equity and cohesion, stability and security of our European society;
- mentally well-functioning people are in better physical health, are more productive and innovative, earn higher incomes on average and hence have a higher socioeconomic status;
- higher productivity, lower absenteeism and less work accidents lead to lower costs for healthcare and social security systems, thus contributing to the recovery of the European economy.

The financial and economic crises hit the European Union with a severe impact on economic growth, national debt, unemployment rates and health. The changed financial and economic climate has a major impact on the society in general and labour force participation and productivity in particular. Stress at work and job insecurity linked with the economic recession have direct negative effects on the resilience and mental health status of the working population and their contribution to the economy and society. Research has shown that people who experience abuse at work, unemployment, poverty and/or social exclusion are at a greater risk of developing mental health problems, such as depression. Recent European studies even linked a 1% increase in national unemployment rates to a 0.8% rise in the rate of suicide.

Mental health issues at work lead to immediate losses in productivity through absenteeism or "presenteeism", pose a risk of unemployment for those affected, and put pressure on social protection systems. Insufficient attention is given to keep people with mental health problems (including addiction) at work or get them back into competitive work. The compounded effect is a shrinking labour force and productivity and increased public spending, at a time when Europe needs all the capability that it can mobilise to promote real growth.

For the decreasing European workforce due to demographic challenges (ageing) and the economic crisis, work life balance is becoming more and more important. Stress has been identified as a major precursor to mental health problems and the spiral of lost productivity and unemployment that they engender.

Estimates indicate that the total costs of work-related mental health diseases and conditions in the EU27 are nearly € 610 billion per year¹. The major impact is suffered by:

- the employers due to absenteeism and presenteeism (€ 270 billion)
- the economy in terms of lost output (€ 240 billion)
- the healthcare systems due to treatment costs (€ 60 billion)
- the social welfare systems due to disability benefit payments (€ 40 billion)
- the persons with mental health problems who suffer from a serious illness and are at risk for poverty and social exclusion.

The economic consequences of mental health problems – mainly in the form of lost productivity – are estimated to average 3–4% of gross national product in European Union (EU) countries². Because severe mental disorders often start in adolescence or young adulthood, the loss of productivity can be long lasting. Mental disorders account for more than one third of the years lived with disability in the WHO European Region.

A major part of these costs may be avoided by closing the present “treatment gap”. Firstly by ensuring universal access to quality integrated care for individuals and their families, second by decreasing the number of years it takes for health care professionals to adopt innovation (on average 17 years at the moment).

On the other hand, good mental health boosts productivity. Evidence-based interventions in the workplace to promote mental health alone could save each year EUR 135 billion, according to the European Commission’s Social Investment Package.

Thus, an accessible and affordable mental healthcare of good quality plays an important – though unfortunately neglected – role in the recovery of the European economy.

The needs

To improve the current situation there is a need to:

- Ensure that persons with mental health problems have the right to access mental health care across the European Union.
- Prevent, detect and treat psychosocial problems in an early stage, e.g. through regular screening of schoolchildren and employees on mental resilience and mental health problems.
- Scale up successful innovative approaches to mental health promotion at work, labour market retention and (re-)integration of people with mental health problems to competitive work.
- Structure and consolidate information and evidence about the societal and economic benefits of mental health care in the health technology assessment of mental healthcare interventions.
- Broaden the scope of research and EU policy actions to the mental health of our (future) working population. E.g. in the upcoming EU strategy for Occupational Safety and Health 2015 – 2020.

¹ Matrix (2013) Economic analysis of workplace mental health promotion and mental disorder prevention programmes and of their potential contribution to EU health, social and economic policy objectives, final report, May 2013. Page 5.

² OECD (2012) Sick on the Job? Myths and realities about mental health and work.

- Build cross-sectorial alliances in the spirit of “Health in All Policies” to develop and to implement effective long-term mental health strategies and to influence socio-economic determinants to keep people living in European communities healthy, active and productive as long as possible.

The concept

The European Union launched a Joint Action on Mental Health and Well-being in February 2013. It aims at “a more rigorous and comprehensive knowledge on mental health and well-being in the EU and the development of an endorsed framework for action in 2016”. It does not provide targeted actions or implementation programmes. In its 63rd meeting on 19th September 2013, WHO Europe calls on international, intergovernmental and non governmental organizations, including user- and family associations and professional associations, to support the implementation of the European Mental Health Action Plan³.

Seeing the huge impact of mental health problems on individuals, society at large and the economy, the members of the Alliance urge European stakeholders not to wait, but to join forces now and to draft a European Implementation Program for Mental Health. In informal consultations of a broad variety of mental health stakeholders, there was enough enthusiasm to bring the idea of a European Implementation Program for Mental Health forward and a clear will to raise awareness for the need of a specific Mental Health Memorandum. There is agreement about building an issue-coalition around this theme.

As shown above, using existing evidence- and practice-based knowledge alone would add enormous value to the European economy and to people living in Europe. The European Implementation Program for Mental Health weighs the existing fragmented knowledge and evidence, breaks it down and makes it accessible, suitable and useful for mental healthcare professionals and policy developers.

The European Implementation Program for Mental Health should include:

- an inventory of available information and evidence of the benefits of mental health prevention, promotion and care, including the business cases for enterprises of all sizes.
- a shared ambition on mental health care management, including prevention, detection and treatment of psychosocial disorders;
- a specific mission for (mental health) care professionals, social partners (employers, employees) and policy developers of national, regional and local authorities.

The European Implementation Program for Mental Health is certainly not a theoretical set of new guidelines for a very specific audience. It should lead to an accessible collection of good practices, information, and evidence and policy recommendations from the perspective of clients, healthcare workers, policy makers and social partners to improve mental health and well-being on behalf of people living in Europe.

³ WHO Regional Office Europe, Resolution EUR/RC63/R10 of 19 September 2013 (sixty-third session)

The way forward

As of 2014, all alliance partners have endorsed this working document. This document is meant to be a shared basis for actions of the present partners and a basis to explore interests and possible activities of like-minded European organisations.

Actions

The partners see several opportunities to develop this Alliance on the one hand and on the other hand contribute to on-going EU policy development. The following actions deserve our full support:

1. Develop a European Implementation Program Mental Health

Based on the open consultation and the concerted responses of parties concerned, stakeholders should create an informal but effective alliance to influence all EU policies in the field of mental health and the workplace. This alliance should define a common EU mental health(care) agenda, set EU mental health(care) priorities and contribute actively to the EU mental health(care) policy development of the European Union over the next 5 years.

2. Public consultations on European policies with possible impact on mental health

In order to influence the European agenda and the European policies on mental health in general and mental well-being under the working population in particular, the partners of the alliance coordinate their inputs to consultations and policy proposals. Over the last year, the alliance has coordinated inputs on 2 public consultations. In their responses to both consultations, individual partners have taken on board the principles and issues of the alliance and stressed the need for more attention for and a stronger focus on mental health. The coordinated effort on the Consultation on a new European Strategy and Health at Work seemed to be successful as shown in the new Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014-2020. The consultation on Patient Safety led to the recognition that a mental health perspective was lacking.

3. Inviting other stakeholders to join the alliance

Mental health does have a huge social and economic impact. The Alliance will call upon stakeholders outside the health domain to tune their vision and priorities and to discuss a mental health agenda, priorities and a roadmap for a European Implementation Program Mental Health.

European Alliance on Mental Health in all Policies

The *European Alliance for Mental Health in all Policies* is an informal co-operation of the partners on the specific issue of economical impacts of mental health and the role it plays to raise labour productivity as a possible exit strategy for the economic crisis. Its aim is to raise awareness for this issue and to stimulate policy development on an EU level in this domain. All partners recognize its importance and try to incorporate it in their own, broader (health) policy agendas. Today, the Alliance is composed of 5 partners.

- AEIP, the European Association of Paritarian Institutions, represents the social protection institutions jointly managed by social partners (paritarian institutions) and aims to promote the paritarian management of social protection at the EU-level. This has been its key objective since its founding in 1996. The values supported by AEIP are based on a balanced representation of employers and employees which is a typical feature of joint – paritarian management, solidarity

and transparency. Through its working groups, AEIP works on EU coordinated pension schemes, pension funds, healthcare and unemployment schemes, local investments as well as paid holiday plans.

AEIP joined the Alliance in order to promote the paritarian approach in the management of mental health risks in workplaces and to develop a framework for cooperation between major stakeholders.

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- AIM, the International Association of Mutual Benefit Societies, is the umbrella organisation of health mutuals and health insurance funds in Europe and in the world. Through its 59 members from 27 countries, AIM provides health coverage to 230 million people in the world and 160 million in Europe through compulsory and/or complementary health insurance and managing health and social facilities. AIM strives to defend the access to healthcare for all through solidarity-based and non-for profit health insurance. Its mission is to provide a platform for members to exchange on common issues and to represent their interests and values in the European and international Institutions.

AIM strives for the recognition of the mutual model, which always includes values like democracy and solidarity. Facing challenges such as ageing of the population, the increasing prevalence of chronic diseases, rising healthcare expenditure and changes in lifestyles, AIM engages for cost-efficient and affordable healthcare for all, strengthened health mutual benefit societies, but also for health protection for all without inequalities. With one fifth of the European population suffering from some type of mental illness, AIM has decided to join its voice to the Alliance in order to promote and improve mental health in Europe and to call on Member States and decision-makers to develop a common framework for action.

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- EPHA, the European Public Health Alliance, is Europe's leading NGO advocating for better health for all and reducing health inequalities. It is a member-led organisation, made up of pan-European, national and local public health NGOs, patient groups, health professionals and disease groups working together to improve health and strengthen the voice of public health in Europe. EPHA's mission is to bring together the public health community to provide thought leadership and facilitate change; to build public health capacity to deliver equitable solutions to European public health challenges, to improve health and reduce health inequalities - including on determinants of good mental health and well-being for all people living in Europe. EPHA is committed to the common European values of solidarity, equity and diversity, better health for all and reducing health inequalities. EPHA believes that the vision of a truly inclusive Europe cannot be fully and sustainably achieved when mental health and well-being of European population is not seriously prioritised in all EU policies. Dissatisfied by the lack of urgency and coherent concerted commitment in the EU as a whole, EPHA decided to join forces with other like-minded organisations in this Alliance to give mental health due and timely priority at all levels of policy and decision-making in Europe.

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- GGZ Nederland (Dutch Association of Mental Health and Addiction Care) is the sector organisation for specialist mental health and addiction care in the Netherlands and initiator of the Alliance. The more than 100 member organisations deliver a wide variety of valuable services to the public, ranging from mental health promotion, prevention and primary mental health care to assisted independent living, sheltered housing, ambulatory specialist mental health care, clinical psychiatric and forensic institutional care. Its more than 100 affiliated service providers employ 85,000 staff, who provide specialist mental healthcare to 815,800 clients suffering from mild, moderate and severe mental health conditions.

The aim of GGZ Nederland and its member organisations is to ensure the availability of high quality, accessible, affordable and sustainable mental health care. After the financial and economic crisis, GGZ Nederland noticed the negative impact of various European policies on mental health (care) in the Netherlands. GGZ Nederland also noticed that a mental health perspective was lacking in many recent EU policies. This was the main reason to initiate an Alliance with the aim to make mental health a priority on the European agenda, to prevent a further deterioration of mental health (care) and to strengthen mental health (care) through coordinated European efforts.

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- MHE, Mental Health Europe, represents associations, organisations and individuals active in the field of mental health and well-being in Europe, including (ex)users of mental health services, volunteers, professionals and service providers. As such, MHE bridges the gap between its members and European institutions, and keeps its members informed and involved in any developments at European Union level.

As the main mental health organization active in Brussels, MHE is committed to advocating for its cause, whether this takes the form of submitting amendments to legislation, consulting with the European Commission, forming alliances with other organizations or being part of expert groups. Mental Health Europe also develops and coordinates its own projects and conducts and disseminates research. Working to inform the general public on the plight of people with mental health problems, Mental Health Europe also cooperates closely with the media, and is often featured in prominent media outlets in Brussels and beyond.

Respect of the rights of persons with mental health problems and their access to quality care and services with a recovery-focus are among MHE's main objectives. MHE believes that there is a need to join forces as a means to ensure that these goals are realized in practice. It is more important than ever to ensure that mental health is high on the EU political agenda and we believe that the collaboration within the framework of the Alliance will allow us to more systematically support the integration of mental health considerations in EU policy making.

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