



EU Mental Health Strategy

The Network for Psychotherapeutic Care in Europe (NPCE) deeply welcomes the EU Commission's engagement to develop an EU Mental Health Strategy.

Mental health requires good living and working conditions. Unemployment and a lower level of education almost double the risk of mental illness. This becomes even more relevant in times of global crisis, such as the Covid-19 pandemic or the climate crises.

A large body of research shows that there is no health without mental health. Protecting and promoting mental health is relevant for the individual well-being, for securing one's ability to learn and work, for preventing (chronic) mental diseases which might result in early retirement and a higher risk to live in poverty, strengthening out-patient care and reducing in-patient care and hospitalisation, and to reduce the number of suicides. Expenditure for preventing mental distress and promoting mental health are cost effective and an investment not only in well-being and health, but also in social and economic prosperity.

Mental illness is still stigmatised. This presents a barrier to people to talk about their mental health problems and to seek professional help. Therefore, anti-stigmatisation of mental illnesses is highly important, as well as easily accessible and cost-free support service for people in psychological crises and need. People with mental illness are a vulnerable group. Their rights must be protected. Their needs must be considered in all areas of life and their social participation must be strengthened.

The NPCE recommends including the following aims in the EU Mental Health Strategy:

1. "Health in all Policies" must be complemented by "Mental Health in all Policies": Mental illnesses must be placed on an equal footing with somatic illnesses. Decision-makers at all levels should include also mental health implications in their decisions about actions and policies.

2. Mental health must be maintained and promoted across all stages of life: This can only be achieved with a broad joint effort. Particular attention should be on the following points:

- Children and adolescents need good living conditions to grow up mentally healthy. This includes support and counselling services for families and their children, as well as good, crisis-proof care and education services.
- Children and young people must be protected from sexual abuse and physical and mental violence. Child protection services must be expanded and financed on a permanent basis. Also, awareness on psychological violence against children and how to prevent it, is needed.
- Employees need working conditions that do not endanger their mental health. Some professions have a higher risk to experience traumatic events during their worktime, such as e.g. police officers, first aid workers or train drivers. Programs and activities that protect against mental stress in the workplace should be expanded. Traumata due to work-related events should be acknowledged as occupational illnesses.
- Also, people in unemployment must be given adequate social support to prevent the development of mental illnesses.
- The elderly needs targeted services to prevent loneliness. The prevention of mental illnesses among the elderly, health promotion and early detection and diagnosis of mental illnesses are

required to improve access to mental healthcare. The prevention of suicides among elderly must be strengthened.

- Climate and environmental protection are prevention of mental illness. The negative effects of the climate crises pose an increasing threat to physical and mental health. Mental health threats due to the climate crises and natural disasters must be acknowledged and included in crisis plans.

3. Ensuring access to good mental healthcare: To provide good mental healthcare for people with mental illnesses, it will be necessary in the future to make more resources available despite growing funding problems. Mental healthcare services must be fully covered by social security systems. Particular attention should be on the following points:

- People with mental illnesses need better support in crisis situations to find support and prevent suicides.
- Mentally distressed and mentally ill people of all ages need direct access to mental healthcare services provided by mental healthcare professionals. Well-trained mental health professionals are crucial to providing high-quality and safe care.
- People with mental illnesses have a right to guideline-oriented psychotherapeutic, psychiatric, and psychological care.
- People with chronic and complex mental illnesses need coordinated mental healthcare and social services.
- People with mental illnesses need adequate psychotherapeutic, psychiatric, and psychological care during inpatient care. Adequate staffing levels in clinics ensure that patients get the care they need. Besides this, adequate staffing also prevents healthcare professionals from psychological distress at work due to workforce shortages.
- For people who have experienced physical and psychological violence, sexual abuse or discrimination, support services and guideline-oriented trauma treatment must be provided.
- Refugees with mental distress and mental illness need access to mental health treatment, including psychological and psychotherapeutic care, from the beginning of their stay. For people who require the services of language and cultural mediators to be able to receive care, these services must be financed.

The NPCE would be pleased if the EU Commission takes the abovementioned aspects into account.

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