

European Coalition for Community Living

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Position of the European Coalition for Community Living on the Commission of the European Communities Green Paper *Improving the mental health of the population: Towards a strategy on mental health for the European Union*

European Coalition for Community Living (ECCL)

The European Coalition for Community Living (ECCL) is a Europe-wide initiative working towards the social inclusion of people with disabilities by promoting the provision of comprehensive, quality community-based services as an alternative to institutionalisation. ECCL was established as one of the recommendations of the Included in Society project, in order to ensure long term action towards de-institutionalisation and the development of community-based services across Europe.

ECCL uses the following definition of the term "institution":

"An institution is any place in which people who have been labelled as having a disability are isolated, segregated and/or compelled to live together. An institution is also any place in which people do not have, or are not allowed to exercise control over their lives and their day-to-day decisions. An institution is not defined merely by its size."

Introduction

ECCL welcomes the initiative of the European Commission to publish the Green Paper on Mental Health and its proposal for the EU strategy on mental health. It is of great importance that the Green Paper points to de-institutionalisation of mental health services and the establishment of services in the community as one of the ways to promote the social inclusion of people with mental disabilities.

Furthermore, ECCL welcomes the fact that the Green Paper acknowledges the findings of the Included in Society project. We would like to reiterate that the provision of comprehensive, quality community-based services is crucial for ensuring equal access to human rights for people with disabilities and ending the human rights abuses committed in institutions. People with disabilities must be given equal rights as other citizens and the opportunity to live with dignity. This, among else, means living included in the community and having control over decisions affecting one's life.

ECCL's position focuses on point 6.2 of the Green Paper and highlights issues relevant to de-institutionalisation and the development and provision of community-based services. We believe that these issues must be central to EU's strategy on mental health, if it is to facilitate the social inclusion of people with mental disabilities and protection of their fundamental rights and dignity.

Need for a comprehensive approach to de-institutionalisation and the provision of community-based services

- The Green Paper states that mentally ill and disabled people across Europe are largely subject to social exclusion, discrimination and violations of human rights and dignity. It also points out that de-institutionalisation and the establishment of community-based services

ECCL Management Partners: Inclusion Europe – Open Society Mental Health Initiative
Mental Health Europe – Autism Europe – European Network of Independent Living
Center for Policy Studies of the Central European University

can support social inclusion. ECCL believes that one cannot speak of social inclusion of people with disabilities until institutions for people with disabilities have been replaced with comprehensive, quality community based services. For this reason, de-institutionalisation must be explicitly stated as one of the priorities of the EU strategy on mental health, alongside issues listed under point 5 of the Green Paper.

- ECCL believes that all people with disabilities must be included in the process of de-institutionalisation and given access to community-based services. In the new EU Member States in Central and Eastern Europe, people with intellectual disabilities make up a large proportion of residents in the long-term stay institutions. In order to ensure that they are not left out from the process of de-institutionalisation, it is important that the Green Paper covers not only people with mental health problems, but also people with intellectual and pervasive developmental disabilities. It is unclear from the Green Paper whether this is the case at the moment.
- Explicit mention must be made of the need to stop the building of new institutions in Europe. In this respect, the EU mental health strategy should point out that the European Structural Funds must be used to establish community based services rather than for the building of new institutions for people with disabilities.
- Policies for de-institutionalisation are crucial in order to replace institutions with community-based services. The EU mental health strategy should therefore highlight how important it is for the Member States to develop policies and action plans for the replacement of institutions for people with disabilities with comprehensive, quality community-based services.
- When referring to community-based services, the EU mental health strategy should highlight the need for the establishment of compulsory systems of quality monitoring and enforcement, oriented to individual rights and needs of users, in which people with disabilities will be recognised as consumers of the services in question.
- Finally, it is important that the EU mental health strategy calls for community-based services which will be based on individual needs and human rights of each person. This is the only way to ensure that such services lead to real inclusion of people with disabilities in society, rather than perpetuate exclusion. In this respect, it is also important to point out that people with disabilities must be involved in any action taken in relation to planning, providing and reviewing of community-based services.

Possible initiatives at Community level

ECCL welcomes the position stated in the Green Paper that the situation in institutions for people with disabilities and the promotion of community-based services should be included in the activities of EU's Fundamental Rights Agency.

Furthermore, we welcome the fact that the Green Paper calls for establishment of the EU-Platform on Mental Health which will facilitate exchange of good practice and policy development among the Member States. We believe it is very positive that the Green Paper promotes the involvement of different actors in the process and believe that ECCL can make a valuable contribution to the Platform. As a network of disability organisations, service providers and other institutions and individuals committed to de-institutionalisation and the promotion of community-based services, we are in a good position to provide the European Commission and the Member States with examples of good practice, evidence based reports and other expertise, which will contribute to the process of de-institutionalisation and the development of community-based services.

Brussels, 28 April 2006

SCHEFTLEIN Juergen (SANCO)

From: Ines Bulic [coordinator@community-living.info]

Sent: Freitag, 28. April 2006 14:54

To: SANCO MENTAL HEALTH

Subject: Position of the European Coalition for Community Living on the Green Paper on Mental Health

Dear Sir or Madam,

Please find attached the Position of the European Coalition for Community Living on the Commission of the European Communities Green Paper *Improving the mental health of the population: Towards a strategy on mental health for the European Union*.

Best regards,

Ines Bulic

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