

European Commission  
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**STATEMENT on the European Commission's Green Paper "Improving the mental health of the population: towards a strategy on mental health of the European Union"**

Regarding the Green Paper on mental health, the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health, (STAKES, Finland) wants to warmly congratulate the European Commission for this timely initiative and for adding a truly important milestone on the European mental health agenda. The publication of the Green Paper can be considered highly significant as it aims at outlining directions to future mental health work in the European Union and paves the way towards a strategy on mental health.

During the last decade, mental health has gained a firm access to the European arena, and it is our common task to maintain this status quo, and even to strengthen this position.

In this context, we would like to highlight the overall importance of creating such a strategy. A strategy could be useful for the Member States in the planning and implementation of their specific measures within the mental health work. On the other hand, we would like to underline the fact that due to the societal and cultural differences between the 25 EU Member States, certain flexibility in the implementation of the strategy will be inevitable.

As to the three specific questions posed by the Green paper, we feel that it is of utmost necessity to include health and mental health in all strategic policy objectives. To achieve this goal, it is vital to aim at increasing the links and collaboration between relevant stakeholders at all levels. Good mental health certainly has an important role to play for example in view of the revised Lisbon strategy.

Further expansions of mental health into other areas need to cover its inclusion in other policies. Here it is crucial that the Commission will be precursor in the development and introduction of such methods within the European Union. Accordingly, focusing on the mental health impact assessment of all decision making is a very welcome progress. Here too, the development and adjustment of the generic health impact assessment methods in the area of mental health is strongly recommended.

The information exchange and co-operation between Member States are central elements of an EU-strategy. At the same time, there is a need to ensure that the information of the EC initiatives and programmes does have a real impact at the level of the Member States. One way of achieving this is to guarantee the commitment of a larger group of actors within the Member States in the processes.

The inclusion of patients, their relatives and the civil society has been highlighted for a good reason. Therefore, concept of "experts" needs to be broadened to include these people and representatives of the various organisations involved.

Promotion of mental health and prevention of mental health problems need to remain in the core of the future strategy. The mental health of children and young people needs special attention on one hand, the mental health of older people on the other.

As the current trend is clearly on reducing the risk factors and enhancing protective factors, one further direction would be the development of a more holistic strategy, in which a salutogenetic perspective is applied. Resilience and self-esteem are key in good mental health of our citizens, and strong attention should be paid to building these features.

Effective means to disseminate good practices between the Member States need to be investigated and applied better than before.

Mental health research needs to have an impact to policy making. A proper balance and delivery should be accomplished and measures to strengthen this link need to be implemented. Special attention should be paid in preserving mental health in the forthcoming initiatives for example on the R&D Framework programmes and elsewhere.

The longstanding and productive work on mental health at the European level needs to be continued. This is an obligation and an imperative to all of us, not only because of ourselves, but as a legacy to the future generations in order to allow them to live in an environment where e.g. stigma and discrimination due to mental health problems no longer exists.

In conclusion, possibilities for improving the mental health of the population of the European Union do exist. It is essential that these possibilities will be exploited to the full in the future. The forthcoming strategy should provide a clear and realistic outline on how to attain this objective, while also providing an insight and a vision as to the anticipated future societal developments in our globalized world.

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