



familien selbsthilfe psychiatrie

Bundesverband der Angehörigen
psychisch Kranker e. V.

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European Commission Green paper on mental health – "Promoting the Mental Health of the Population" – Our Statement and contribution to the consultation process

Dear Madam,
Dear Sir,

here our comment on the Green Paper of the European Commission "Improving the mental Health of the population".
Our association is an NGO, representing more than 500 registered local family support groups.

We are the German Federal Association of relatives of the mentally ill (BAPK).
Local support groups are the backbone of the family movement in Germany, trying hard to improve the living of people affected with mental health problems, their families and their relatives.

BAPK is member of the European network EUFAMI. (European Federation of Associations of Families of People with mental illness). EUFAMI will also obtain a copy of our comment.

Kindest regards

Angela Bleckmann
Executive secretary

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**Comment of
The German Federal Association of Relatives of the Mentally Ill
(BApK)
on the**

**Green Paper of the European Commission
"Improving the mental health of the population:
Towards a strategy on mental health for the European Union"**

Situation

Mental ill health is very common. The family and the social environment play an essential role in connection with care and support as well as prevention. In the Federal Republic of Germany, more than 60 per cent of the people suffering from chronic mental illnesses are cared for by and within their families. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to include them in all activities concerning mental illness and mental health. As a mental health family self-help support group, the German Federal Association of Relatives of the Mentally Ill considers itself to be the spokesperson and the representative body of these families and their relatives who suffer from mental ill health.

General statements of the Green Paper

In this context, we welcome the Green Paper of the European Commission on mental health which states rightly "there is no health without mental health". We assent to the statements made in the Green Paper on

- the continuing growth of mental ill health
- the serious economic and social consequences
- the necessity to improve all forms of intervention, the medical as well as the social and socio-political,
- the meaningfulness of action at a European level



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In our view, the EU initiatives and actions mentioned in the Green Paper, as well as the Helsinki Conference at the beginning of 2005 are positive signs that the importance of mental health, the prevention of illness and the reduction of its serious effects have been acknowledged at a European level. We basically approve the Green Paper and its implied options for action which can be seen as a continuation of this policy.

Three Questions in section 8 of the Green Paper

In section 8 of the Green Paper (p. 13), the Commission invites all interested citizens and organisations to comment on three specific questions:

1.

The population's emotional and mental health as much as its physical health are of the utmost importance for the realisation of the objectives set by the European Commission as presented in section 1 ff. Mental illnesses are often severe diseases with far-reaching consequences for the person involved and their relatives, as well as for society as a whole and the national economy. To prevent them if possible or to alleviate its consequences respectively is both ethically imperative, economically sensible and in all aspects consistent with the objectives set by the European Commission.

2.

The actions taken so far and the measures being considered – as they are outlined in the Green Paper – focus on important problematic issues and are welcomed by us as steps in the right direction. However, they cannot replace a comprehensive strategy. We are convinced that a holistic and comprehensive approach is necessary in order to achieve broad and lasting success in the fields



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of mental ill health and prevention – an approach that could be included in an EU-strategy. Herein, the Family Self-help Organisation claims an adequate position. All in all, the choice of the main focus presented in section 5 appears to us be appropriate and will help in achieving the goals.

3.

In sections 6 and 7, recent and planned as well as possible initiatives are presented in very different fields. Without doubt, they serve the objectives mentioned in question

3. It would be both conceivable and desirable to offer a multitude of further activities that would have to be developed within the scope of the target EU-strategy.

Within the boundaries of our resources as a self-help association, we work in some of the mentioned fields where we have pursued innovative approaches. Throughout the EU this happens within the associations of the relatives and their umbrella organisation EUFAMI as well. It also suggests including such approaches in an EU-action plan and developing new initiatives together respectively.

Conclusion / Proposals

We would like to see that the Green Paper and ensuing papers explicitly mention and include the work and the importance of family self-help. In this respect, we want to allude to section 1, paragraph 5 firstly, which should refer to "patient and family organisations". Secondly, the last sentence in section 4 merely refers to patient organisations, whereas family organisations are not mentioned at all. Finally, we think that the presentation in section 6.2 ("A change in paradigm") needs to be changed. In our opinion, the idea that patients and relatives are "instructed" by professional helpers is based on an antiquated role understanding. We would add also a plea that the equal status of all the persons involved (patients, relatives, and professional helpers) should be stated in all papers and initiatives, not only via the language used, but also as regards the content.



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Families with a relative who is mentally ill play an extremely important role in the care and support of the patients, ensuring their social integration and protection as well as assisting with relapse prevention. They need help and support, but they also have a right to be heard and considered in the issues concerning them. This basic principle has to apply nationwide as well as within the European Union.

The Family Self-help Organisation represents these families. It embodies a large and often underestimated reservoir of experience and expertise. We expect the EU-strategy or the action plan on mental health respectively to take the expertise of the Family self-help Group into account during planning and implementation of initiatives and to base their promotion on set regulations.

This paper represents the views of its author on the subject. These views have not been adopted or in any way approved by the Commission and should not be relied upon as a statement of the Commission's or Health & Consumer Protection DG's views. The European Commission does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this paper, nor does it accept responsibility for any use made thereof.