



# IUHPE

International Union for Health Promotion and Education

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## International Union for Health Promotion and Education: Comments on the EC Green Paper on Improving the Mental Health of the Population

Commissioned by the IUHPE President

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On behalf of the IUHPE Board of Trustees

We welcome the publication of the Green Paper and the opportunity to participate in the consultation process that has been put in place.

The development of an EU strategy on mental health is long overdue and such a strategy has a critical role to play in promoting the health and well-being of European citizens and in reducing the increasing burden of mental health problems at a European level. A comprehensive European mental health strategy needs to embrace the full spectrum of services ranging from promotion and prevention to treatment and rehabilitation. As such, adopting a population level approach to the promotion of mental health needs to feature prominently as an integral part of this strategy development. We therefore need to make the case for the inclusion of mental health promotion as a core element of a European mental health strategy.

The purpose of the Green Paper is described as being to launch a 'debate' about the relevance of mental health in the EU – it would be preferable to see this framed as to raise the visibility of mental health and its relevance to the citizens and diverse sectors across the EU member states. In this respect, the case for promoting positive mental health in its own right should be made more strongly and spelled out more clearly.

Some specific points to highlight in response to the Green Paper:

1) The relevance of mental health of the population for the EU's strategic policy objectives:

- The wider health, social and economic benefits of improving mental health at a European level needs to be recognised in the strategy order to promote greater awareness of what positive mental health can contribute to health and

social gain and to reduce the socio-economic costs to society due to the burden of mental ill-health.

- As demonstrated by the recent reviews of the evidence in this area, effective mental health promotion strategies have the potential to contribute to a range of improved health and social outcomes in terms of educational achievement, employment, reduced crime, and delinquency, improved sexual health, family and social relationships and reducing inequalities. There is persuasive case for governments to invest in mental health promotion and improvement as an effective strategy for creating health and social gain.
- The Mental Health Declaration for Europe advocates making 'mental health an inseparable part of public health' and thus recognises the need for action across a range of areas and consideration of the impact of all policies on mental health.
- The significance of mental health to physical health should be elaborated upon.

2) The development of a comprehensive EU-Strategy on mental health would provide an important mandate for action at national level and support for the consolidation of existing initiatives:

- The Green Paper places a lot of emphasis on developing mental health services, this needs to be placed in the wider context of a public health/population health approach where service provision is one part of a more comprehensive strategy which addresses how mental health is integral to positive health and quality of life and to the functioning of individuals, families, communities and society.
- Comprehensive Approach: The promotion and maintenance of mental health at a population level calls for a comprehensive approach, including effective policies and strategies at European, national, regional and community level. A supportive and favourable policy context is critical to ensure that initiatives to promote mental health are sustained. This includes dedicated resource allocation, investment in the necessary infrastructure such as research, training, policy and practice development and providing strategic leadership in driving forward the mental health agenda.
- A comprehensive strategy recognises the need for multidisciplinary working and cross-sector collaboration in order to ensure effective policy and practice implementation. It is now accepted that the main determinants of mental health and mental health inequalities lie outside the health sector and that inter-sector collaboration is needed to effectively address them.
- Focus on addressing the determinants of mental health: Factors such as poverty, housing, employment, education, safe neighbourhoods, cohesive and socially just societies are all recognised as influencing people's mental health potential. Creating a mentally healthy society entails addressing the broader socio-environmental and political influences and working across diverse sectors in order to address the upstream determinants of mental health (Barry, 2005).
- Strategy development based on a clear set of principles: The Strategy needs to be underpinned by a clear set of principles to include, for example: citizenship, a rights-based approach, partnership, effectiveness, equity, public participation, respect, empowerment, quality and accountability.

- Political Will: There is a need to mobilise political will and commitment to ensure that the necessary resources are put in place across EU member states to enable effective policies and plans to be put into action.
- Stress the importance of evidence-based practice and policy developments, building on what we already know to work (IUHPE reviews) and highlight the added value of concerted action across countries as evidenced in the work of European-wide networks such as IMPHA etc.

3) Priorities: The Green Paper proposes that the EU-strategy would focus on development across the four areas of promotion, prevention, treatment and developing a research and information system. This is consistent with adopting a comprehensive population approach to improving mental health. In addition there is a need for developing a support infrastructure for promoting mental health at a European level. Support infrastructure includes the mental health information strategy, the research and development strategy and the human resource strategy. The service components include mental health promotion in schools, workplace, primary, secondary and tertiary prevention, good practice guidelines and health service links with justice, employment services, schools, NGOs and the community sector. There is a need for investment in building the necessary infrastructure and providing strategic leadership and capacity building for the workforce. A support infrastructure would include the following elements:

- Establish a policy framework that provides a mandate for action in member states
- Develop a strategic action plan which identifies priorities, key goals and objectives for action across member states
- Co-ordinate an inter-sector and partnership approach to policy implementation at European, governmental, regional and local levels
- Invest in research to guide evidence-based mental health promotion policy and practice
- Invest in human, technical, financial and organisational resources to achieve priority actions and outcomes
- Support capacity building and training of the mental health promotion workforce to ensure effective practice and programme delivery
- Identify models of best practice and support the adoption and adaptation of high quality, effective and sustainable programmes, particularly those meeting the needs of disadvantaged groups
- Engage the participation of the wider community
- Put in place a system of monitoring policy implementation and impact
- Systematically evaluate programme process, impact, outcome and cost
- Monitoring of mental health improvements across population needs to emphasise the inclusion of measures of positive mental health status i.e. indicators of positive mental health, as well as mental ill-health at community level
- Invest in developing the skills and incentives for the identification and treatment of mental ill health by primary care workers
- Provide for cultural adaptation of programmes and services to meet the special needs of migrant populations and cultures in transition

4) Initiatives to support co-ordination between member states: The initiatives outlined appear to cover the main settings and population groups. In addition, the following points are highlighted:

- **Advocacy:** There is a clear need for advocacy as mental health is often an implicit rather than explicit part of health policy and remains hidden and not of high priority. Political commitment needs to be mobilised so that mental health is given greater priority in terms of policy development, including policies which promote mentally healthy living, working and social environments. Among the key agents are politicians, policy makers, educators, opinion leaders and members of civil society. There is a need to raise awareness of the determinants of mental health at public and policy making levels. Public participation is critical to this process, as policy development needs to be based on greater public awareness of, and engagement with the importance of good mental health to overall health and social well-being. In other words, the visibility and value of mental health needs to be enhanced
- **Tackling Stigma:** The issue of stigma needs to be addressed in terms of public perceptions and understandings of both positive mental health as a resource for living, as well as attitudes to mental ill-health and mental health service users. Active engagement across different sectors is needed to promote greater understanding of the concept of positive mental health and its importance for overall health and quality of life. To increase the visibility of mental health at a societal level a public awareness strategy is needed in order to 'remove the shadows' of the stigma surrounding mental ill-health and to promote greater public and professional understanding of the importance of promoting positive mental health in its own right as a resource for everyday life and societal well-being. Media-based advocacy to reduce stigmatisation and promote better access to care across Europe is a priority.
- In terms of the deinstitutionalisation of mental health services, this needs to be accompanied by a commitment to the development of comprehensive community-based services offering evidence-based best practice interventions, which incorporate a recovery perspective at all levels of service delivery. The involvement of service users and carers in the planning and development of services needs to be incorporated. Service users need to be viewed as active participants in their own recovery rather than as passive recipients of services. The links between primary care and specialised mental health services need to be strengthened in order to support timely access to appropriate user-friendly services. A range of mainstream community services such as housing, welfare, employment and education, need to be provided in order to support the integration of service users in their own communities and to promote their quality of life and well-being.
- **Inequalities:** The relationship between inequalities and mental health needs to be highlighted – the specific risks faced by low-income and disadvantaged groups, refugees and asylum seekers, migrant workers, ethnic minorities, homeless, prisoners among other marginalised groups needs to be prioritized in the strategy
- **Added-value of concerted action:** In view of the insufficient resources for research and development of effective policies and programmes in the mental health area, it makes sense to pool knowledge, expertise and resources. This

includes promoting mental health among decision and policy-makers at all levels of governance and communicating to a wider public audience what mental health promotion is about, why it is important and the health, social and economic benefits that it can bring.

- **Dedicated funding:** The provision of dedicated funding and resources is needed in order to realize the full potential of improved mental health in enhancing and maintaining the well-being and functioning of individuals, families and communities across the EU member states.

We wish also to suggest relatively minor modifications in the document that would nevertheless improve its precision:

- Replace the term 'citizens' with 'individuals', in line with European mobility patterns and considerations to refugees, etc.
- Where reference is made to 'social, school and working life', add reference to 'home' life
- Mention economic determinants of mental health, along side social determinants
- Where reference to vulnerable groups is mentions, include individuals with chronic pain.

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