

Richmond Foundation's response to the Green Paper



**Improving the mental health of the population. Towards
a strategy on mental health for the European Union.**



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1. Introduction

Richmond Foundation is an NGO working in mental health in Malta. It provides, services for persons with mental health problems including supportive housing, home support, rehabilitation and supported employment. Furthermore it advocates for mental health policies in the work place and provides employee assistance programmes. The Foundation works towards the empowerment of mental health services users and their carers and promotes the concept of self help. An ongoing media campaign aimed at promoting mental wellbeing and fighting stigma related to mental illness is in its second year of implementation.

In line with its policy of consultation with mental health service users, their carers and the public in general as well as other stakeholders the Foundation organised a national public consultation seminar in order to obtain feedback regarding the Green Paper. A wide consultation process was carried out which included the collection of feedback through a questionnaire.

2. The recommendations below include feedback obtained through the consultation process as well as Richmond Foundation's own feedback.

Richmond Foundation welcomes the European Commission's Green Paper "Improving the mental health of the population. Towards a strategy on mental health for the European Union" and congratulates the Commission for taking this step following so soon after the WHO Ministerial Meeting in Helsinki in January 2005.

Richmond Foundation recommends that Commission when developing its strategy would include the following:

- mental health promotion and mental illness prevention should be mainstreamed into all policies both at European Commission and National Member State levels
- mental health promotion should to be given added priority and that different actions are needed when dealing with mental health promotion and mental illness prevention



- a strong anti-stigma campaign is necessary across the member states in view of the fact that stigma leads to the exclusion of persons experiencing mental ill health from employment, the family and society.
- the Commission proactively involves mental health services users, carers and NGOs working in mental health in its future actions

- actors in the fields of education, media, employment, health and civil society are mobilised when dealing with the complexities of mental health promotion and mental illness prevention
- health and safety policies in the work place are enforced in a way that the mental health of employees at the workplace is safeguarded
- persons who have experienced mental illness need to have their employment safeguarded in order to ensure that they are not excluded from society
- mental health service users are to be considered as one of the major vulnerable groups which need to be focused on in National Action Plans against Poverty and Social Exclusion
- minimum standards for long term care of mental illness are outlined in its future actions which standards should be sensitive to the diverse and complex social structures, to cultural differences, gender, age as well as the types of serious mental illness (e.g schizophrenia and bipolar disorder)
- the treatment of mental illness should take place in the community and that high quality care in the person's home should be the preferred method of care. Supportive housing providing different levels of support, respite care, day centres, day hospitals and a range of inpatient services should constitute the basis of community care. Furthermore access to health and social services, education and life long learning should be available and user friendly. Treatment should include both pharmacological as well as other forms of therapies
- people experiencing mental illness need to be treated with dignity and respect, have a right to information and to partake in the decision making process both of their own treatment and of service development. There needs to be clear and transparent mechanisms which ensure that the



- rights of persons with mental health problems are safeguarded at all times, including within community mental health services.
- That a European Body is set up for the collection of information on mental health practices in the European Union and for the dissemination of best practices. Furthermore this body would be responsible for the monitoring of the mental health of the EU citizens.

3. Whilst Richmond Foundation acknowledges that to date funding of health services has fallen under the responsibilities of national governments, mental health services should receive adequate funding that will ensure that the cost of mental illness to the individual, health and social care and society are appropriately covered. If this does not happen the best intentioned strategy will result in failure.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dolores Gauci".

Dolores Gauci
Chief Executive Officer

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