



Statement ahead of World Mental Health Day on 10 October by Stella Kyriakides, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety

Brussels, 9 October 2020

Ahead of World Mental Health Day on 10 October, Stella **Kyriakides**, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, made the following statement:

"COVID-19 has had an impact on our collective mental health which is hard to quantify. But we know that it is widespread, it is significant and it is increasing. Even before the pandemic, mental illness was already affecting more than one in every six Europeans. This comes at a high price not only for those affected, but also for our societies. Mental health affects how we think, feel and act – at every stage of our lives.

As a clinical psychologist, I am acutely and painfully aware of the damaging effects the pandemic could bring about on the mental health of all of us, and whilst we cannot yet evaluate the risk, we know that the long-term impacts will be significant. The kaleidoscope of mental health challenges ranges from anxiety to loneliness and depression. We need to pay close attention to the signs our body gives us.

While my thoughts go out especially to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged of our societies, I am also very concerned about the specific needs of other important groups, including our elderly, our brave health care workers and those providing essential social services.

It is however the mental health needs of our young generation that Eurofound recently highlighted as an issue of special concern: this summer they reported the lowest levels of well-being and remain at greatest risk of depression. We need to address this urgently to avoid, at all costs, a lost COVID generation. And we need to do so together, joining efforts across the EU Institutions, the Member States and the wide community of stakeholders.

This year's World Mental Health Day is calling for increased investment in mental health and better access to services. On our side, we will support, with up to €8.4 million, the roll out of best practice for community-based mental health system reform, multi-level national suicide prevention, step-wise intervention programmes to tackle depression, as well as an integrated housing approach for people with severe mental health problems.

The pandemic is an invaluable reminder of the importance of looking after our mental health. We are facing daily and unprecedented challenges. It is understandable that we are all worried and stressed, anxious about the present and the future. It is essential that we work together to tackle the mental as well as the physical consequences of this pandemic. We should not shy away from asking for help – be it for ourselves, for a family member, a friend or colleague. Taking mindful care of mental health will be crucial to move out of this crisis stronger and together."

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Press contacts:

[Stefan DE KEERSMAECKER](#) (+32 2 298 46 80)

[Darragh CASSIDY](#) (+32 2 298 39 78)

General public inquiries: [Europe Direct](#) by phone [00 800 67 89 10 11](#) or by [email](#)