Mental Health
Investing in personalised community based services

ESN statement following up the launch of the report
Mental Health and Wellbeing in Europe

European Parliament
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ESN is the independent network for social services in Europe. Our mission is to help change the lives of the most vulnerable in society through the delivery of quality social services. We bring together the people who are key to the design and delivery of vital care and support at the local level to learn from each other and contribute their experience and expertise to building effective European and national social policy.
EU 2020 STRATEGY

The role of mental health services

Many European countries facing financial constraints are reducing their health and welfare budgets. Mental health problems, however, tend to increase during economic downturns. This compounds the need for decisive action. In addition, the economic cost of mental health problems is substantial, estimated at more than €2000 per annum for every European household. Consequently, ESN considers that there is a pressing moral and an economic case for investing in positive mental health and well-being.

With a view to the implementation of the European Pact for Mental Health in the framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy, ESN wants to highlight the importance of a stronger presence of mental health and mental wellbeing within the framework that leads policy directions up to the year 2020.

Mental health problems can be related to a wide range of factors, i.e. psychological, physical, social, environmental, or genetic. Therefore, there is an eminent need to provide a wide range of services to help people with mental health problems. In this, mental health services play a leading role in helping achieve (some of) the EU 2020 targets.

Mental health services must be person-centred, counting on users’ involvement and focused on their resources and strengths. They should also draw on the expertise of professionals from different sectors such as social, health, education, employment and housing, and ensure that coordination mechanisms are in place to guarantee that they work together with private and voluntary sectors, users and their families for a person’s recovery to be fully successful.

ESN recognises that person-centred services should take account of people in specific periods of their lives (children, young people, working adults and older people), and therefore would like to offer the following observations and recommendations for intervention.

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1 Mental Health Services should include cooperation between primary health care and social care settings as well as specialised mental health services (treating severe disorders)
Children

It is essential to invest in mental well-being for every child, with a specific focus on raising awareness within mainstream education, health, housing and social welfare services. In addition, certain children are particularly vulnerable to mental health problems, for example:

Children facing family tensions due to economic circumstances
Economic strain affects relationships within the family and the wider community; for instance, worries about job security, income and problems at work. Such tensions can affect children’s emotional well-being. The growing economic difficulties put increasing pressure on parents ability to provide for their children not only emotionally but also materially.

Children facing discrimination and bullying in schools
Notable increase in xenophobia further marginalizes migrant or minority families and children leading to discrimination and bullying in schools. In such context, children’s emotional well-being and capacity to learn is affected. In addition, children with mental health problems can sometimes be excluded from mainstream education and be placed in psychiatric institutions. Such exclusions in adolescence can result in long term consequences with young people growing up and into adult mental health service users.

Children in alternative care
Children who are unable to grow up with their biological parents are particularly vulnerable and should receive alternative care if possible in substitute families. Alternative care should equal quality care and intervention should focus on the needs of the child. Supporting children to develop their resilience, and parents to manage their mental health problems should be the focus of work.

ESN recommends that:

- Governments invest in children’s mental health promotion to guarantee their long term well-being.

- Early support to families, such as parenting programmes, should be provided by local authorities to help prevent children’s longer-term emotional and mental health problems.

- Nurseries and schools should provide an environment that promotes the child’s well-being. These efforts must be sensitive to the full range of developmental, cultural/ethnic and personal differences in students but with an emphasis on the inclusive nature of schools. The aim being to promote “one school for all” that would allow students with mental health problems to maintain social and family links, reconnect and engage.

- Professionals working with children and families should receive a shared core of awareness and skills training which addresses mental well-being.

- Services for children and families should listen to and take explicit account of the needs of parents with mental health problems and their children.

As a society, it is necessary to recognise the importance of mental health of children on the basis that the mental health and well-being of children is known to be a strong predictor of their mental health in adulthood.
Young People

The combined effects of dropping out of school, unemployment, social exclusion, poverty and lack of opportunities may cause particular mental health risks for many young people. Worsening labour market conditions impact particularly severely on young people. There is also a growing concern about the increasing social divide between young people. In many impoverished areas, young people have reduced life chances which may reduce their employment prospects, etc.

Teenage depression may cause severe psychosocial impairment in adult life, and as such, is a major public health problem. Substance abuse and dependence at the age of 15–24 years is frequently associated with mental health problems. In addition, suicide is one of the three leading causes of death among young people. The European suicide rate is 22.2 for boys and 4.8 for girls, or around 13 in average[^4].

**ESN recommends that:**

- National public health agencies should act with governments to raise awareness of the dangers of glamorised reporting of suicides and use of alcohol and drugs in the media.

- Regional and local health, social services and education should coordinate actions to tackle depression, substance abuse and suicide and seek to support, involve and empower young people to strengthen their personal development and skills.

- Local health and social services should adopt a holistic approach, such as “one-stop shop” services for young people with role models and peer support.

- Local public services should ensure appropriate training for all health professionals in contact with adolescents including primary care providers such as doctors/GP’s, teachers and youth workers; so that all understand the different ways in which mental health problems may show themselves during adolescence and know what to do as a consequence.

- National statistical offices should gather, analyse and report up to date data on the incidence, prevalence, antecedents and consequences of mental health problems in adolescents.

People of Working Age

Improving competitiveness and employment rates are crucial to achieve the EU 2020 objectives. An increase of employment with higher productivity is key. The European Union has an important role to play in recognising mental health and well being as central to active inclusion in the labour market.

Public services have an important role to play in helping people with mental health problems access employment. Workplace prevention and health promotion are worthwhile for enterprises and business since healthy, productive employees make a vital contribution to a company's success and competitiveness.

ESN recommends that:

- National and regional governments see active inclusion in the labour market as a key element of recovery for people of working age with a mental health problem.
- Public services, with the appropriate policy and legislative framework in place, play a key role in providing advice, support and care for people with mental health problems to gain and retain employment.
- Employers should include the promotion of their employees health and well-being into their management policy. Public services as one of the biggest employers in Europe should lead the way in mental health and wellbeing promotion of their own employees.
- National statistical offices should undertake research to agree on recommendations to help employers understand how they can provide reasonable accommodation for employees with mental health problems.

Older People

Mental health problems are common in older people and can pose a barrier to active ageing. Depression affects 10-15% of persons over the age of 65 and can not only impact on their quality of life but also predict premature mortality and be a risk factor for functional disability.

Over 5 million people in the EU have dementia, with Alzheimer being the most common form with a prevalence of 2% in 65-69 years old to 22% in 85-89 years old. Older people have also the highest suicide rates (in 2005 from 16,38-22,9 per 100000 in EU 27) of all age cohorts. The number of people affected by mental ill health will increase without effective intervention.

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Socioeconomic factors, in particular social isolation, increases the vulnerability with older people at a higher poverty risk than the general population in a number of Member States and with added risks of neglect and even abuse, the risk of mental health problems can be considerable.

**ESN recommends that:**

- Health and social care services should prioritise disease prevention and health promotion amongst older people including local awareness campaigns focused on active ageing and the well-being of the elderly. These campaigns could be developed within an interdisciplinary forum of local stakeholders.

- Member states should address the issue of social exclusion faced by an increasing number of older people, for example, minimum income provisions for older people have an essential role in alleviating or reducing poverty risk amongst the elderly. In addition, older people should have access to quality health and long-term care when they need it.

- National, regional and local governments should recognise the importance of combating elderly abuse which increases with dependency, for example, establishing and promoting the rights of older people in need of long-term care so that the dependent elderly are better protected and cared for.

- Training, support and respite care should be provided to informal carers and innovative approaches, such as new technologies (e.g. telecare, web-based approaches, etc.), are developed.

- Legislation is adopted to provide for carer’s leave and support informal carers - ensure an adequate old age pension to those who have taken career breaks or moved to part-time work to care for a dependent relative.

- National statistical offices undertake further research on the quality of elderly care in the home and in residential settings.