



“Implementation of Mental Health Promotion and Prevention Strategies in EU Member States and Applicant Countries” (EMIP)

Response to EU Green Paper on Mental Health

EMIP welcomes and supports the proposal for the development of an EU strategy for mental health. We are aware that progress in improving the mental health of the European population will depend not only on improving quality of life and protecting the rights and dignity of people with mental health problems, but also on action to *promote mental health and prevent mental ill-health*.

The mental health of the European population is a resource to put Europe back on the path to long-term prosperity. Action to promote and protect mental well-being – of individuals, families, organisations and communities – will be crucial in achieving the European Commission’s New Social Agenda, with its focus on solidarity and prosperity.

There is abundant robust evidence that the skills and attributes associated with positive mental health lead to improved physical health, better quality of life, reduced crime, higher educational attainment, economic well-being and personal dignity. Mental well-being also contributes fundamentally to the extent to which people feel able and motivated to exercise choice and control and to adopt healthy lifestyles. It is essential to enabling individuals, families and communities to realise their full potential and to make a positive contribution.¹

¹ [World Health Organization \(2004a\)](http://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/en/prevention_of_mental_disorders_sr.pdf) Prevention of mental disorders: Effective interventions and policy options Geneva: WHO
http://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/en/prevention_of_mental_disorders_sr.pdf

[World Health Organization \(2004b\)](http://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/en/promoting_mhh.pdf) Promoting mental health: Concepts, emerging evidence, practice Geneva: WHO
http://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/en/promoting_mhh.pdf

We particularly welcome the support offered through the strategy to increase the coherence of actions in the health and particularly non-health policy sectors in member states and at the community level and the proposals for the development of information and knowledge on mental health. EMIP's work with 12 EU partner countries has clearly demonstrated to us the need for a comprehensive, holistic approach that builds partnerships and demonstrates that promoting mental health is the responsibility of, and will benefit, all sectors.²

Specific responses to the consultation questions

How relevant is the mental health of the population for EU's strategic policy objectives?

EMIP supports the view taken in the 2005 *WHO declaration on mental health* which states that:

"there is no health without mental health. Mental health is central to the human, social and economic capital of nations and should therefore be considered as an integral and essential part of other public policy areas such as human rights, social care, education and employment".

Mental health underpins the achievement of the EU's strategic policy objectives. Without a mentally healthy society, we will not achieve prosperity, solidarity, social justice or quality of life for citizens.

The case for tackling the factors that exclude people with mental health problems *and* for action to prevent mental health problems is significant. The social and economic costs of mental ill health are wide ranging: one in four Europeans experience a significant episode of mental illness during their lifetime and mental health problems account for approximately 20% of the total burden of ill-health in Europe.³ The loss to European GDP is 3-4% per annum and suicide has been identified as the third highest cause of death for young people. These are robust reasons to have an EU strategy. .

However, a greater focus is needed on the development of a strategy to support the mental health and well-being of the whole community. Action to promote the mental health and well-being of the whole population, in schools, in the workplace, in the community, in the health care sector, and reaching out to at risk and vulnerable groups, will be essential to achieving social cohesion, better social and economic welfare and the transition of the EU into a knowledge society. This means involving those beyond traditional mental health services and integrating the priorities across generic strategies and programmes. It is important that mental health be integrated into EU strategic policy objectives and other EU strategies and programmes.

A comprehensive approach to mental health at every level is needed and an EU strategy will help to achieve this within member states.

Key areas of importance include the following:

² <http://www.emip.org>

³ European Commission (2005) *Green Paper: Improving the mental health of the population. Towards a strategy on mental health for the EU* Brussels: Health and Consumer Protection Directorate General

http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/ph_determinants/life_style/mental/green_paper/mental_gp_en.pdf

- **Work and workplace:** The need to support people with mental health problems to return to work and to create more mentally healthy workplaces.
The need to provide more active, work oriented rehabilitation in order to boost social inclusion and return people to mental well-being.
The need to recognise the contribution of those who contribute through unpaid work e.g. volunteering, caring and being active citizens, as well as supporting and creating opportunities for those who are unable to enter paid employment and to recognise the valuable contributions of all citizens.
- **Health care sector:** In terms of mental health, the health care sector is both a high-risk workplace for staff, a stressful life event for patients and a key player in supporting promotion and prevention for the general population.
- **Access to mainstream opportunities:** Inclusion and recovery are particularly significant to achieving the EU's objectives of solidarity and social justice. It will be important to identify and address barriers to participation for people with mental health difficulties and to do so in the context of a recovery model.
- **Quality of life** is a significant health and mental health outcome. Consistent monitoring of quality of life/mental health and well-being is therefore needed across Europe.
- **Determinants of mental health and well-being:** greater clarity on the wider determinants of mental health and well-being is needed. Mental health problems are not a random misfortune: across the spectrum of disorders, poor mental health is associated with inequality, material deprivation, unemployment, low educational attainment, violence and abuse, neglect in childhood. "Inequality and exclusion are both a cause and consequence of mental health problems".⁴

Would an EU strategy add value to existing and envisaged actions and are the proposed priorities adequate?

The findings of the EMIP national workshops demonstrate that a framework which creates coherence of actions in different policy sectors across member states and provides a platform for involving stakeholders across all settings and sectors in building solutions around the four priorities would add value to and help to build on action being taken forward in member and applicant states.

It is already clear from responses to the Green Paper consultation that a comprehensive EU strategy would help to raise the profile of the importance of mental health within member states as well as within the EU and other European and international bodies. It would potentially lead to further actions and a consistent and evidence-based approach across member states. It is envisaged that, once developed, the strategy

⁴ Rogers A and Pilgrim D (2003) *Mental Health and Inequality* Basingstoke: Palgrave;
Melzer D, Fryers T and Jenkins R (2004) *Social inequalities and the distribution of common mental disorders* Maudsley Monographs Hove: Psychology Press

would need co-coordinated implementation and evaluation with the commitment of resources to do so and agreed timescales for action.

EMIP fully supports the four priorities to:

- (1) promote the mental health of all;
- (2) address mental ill health through preventive action;
- (3) improve the quality of life of people with mental ill health or disability through social inclusion and the protection of their rights and dignity; and
- (4) develop a MH information, research and knowledge system for the EU.

The balance of these four issues is most welcomed. Priorities that move us away from solely addressing population mental health through provision of health and social care services to ones that re-orient health services and address the determinants of mental health are long overdue. The feasibility of such approaches has been demonstrated by EU and WHO projects and networks such as the Implementing Mental Health Promotion Action project (IMHPA), the European Network of Smoke-Free Hospitals or the WHO Network of Health Promoting Hospitals.

The determinants of effective implementation, identified by the EMIP project, demonstrate that the following factors support the development and delivery of mental health promotion in member states:

- Mental health promotion policy (national and local)
- Cross sector ownership
- Marketing mental well-being
- MHP contributes to service reform/improved outcomes for people with mental health problems
- Governance/performance management/accountability
- Clear definition of success and how it will be measured
- Capacity building across all sectors
- Evidence base, evaluation and MHP intelligence/data

Are the proposed initiatives appropriate to support the co-ordination between member states?

The initiatives proposed appear to be appropriate although more detail on this would be useful. The development of an action plan would be welcome. It would be beneficial for both the dialogue with member states and the EU platform to address all the priorities.

Key issues of importance include the following:

- Cost-benefit analysis of promotion and prevention would be welcome.
- Greater opportunities for networking, sharing of information, partnership working. Care should be taken that these opportunities are open, transparent and inclusive.

Conclusion

In conclusion, EMIP welcomes and supports the proposals as set out in the Green Paper. The proposals in our view could be strengthened through a stronger emphasis within the proposed options for action on tackling the broader determinants of mental ill health, action to strengthen the determinants of effective implementation of mental health promotion and engaging the non-health policy sectors.

This statement has been endorsed by all EMIP partners and experts:

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