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## Promoting Mental Health Policies in the European Union Statement for the upcoming Spanish EU Presidency

### Key issues at stake in Spain regarding mental health policies - recent developments and reforms

The Promotion of Personal Autonomy and Care for People in a Situation of Dependency Law, 39/2006, is an historic opportunity for people with serious mental illness. It recognises the right to receive the necessary support to place them in a condition of equality to be able to confront the disabilities caused by mental illness. However, there are some aspects of concern regarding the practical application of the law:

- The suitability of the Dependency Assessment Scale for the specific characteristics of people with mental illness
- The consideration of the promotion of personal autonomy, so important for rehabilitation, in the same proportion as the dependency care
- Social and health participation, as well as that of the user himself, in the definition of the Individualized Care Plan (PIA)
- Uncertainty caused by the unequal implementation of the law in the different autonomous regions of the State.
- The development of a specific portfolio of services for the care of people with serious mental illness that attends to their needs
- The need for specific training in aspects of mental health for the evaluators who carry out the assessment of people with serious mental health problems

The National Health System Mental Health Strategy (2007): Following the European guidelines (Helsinki declaration), this strategy follows in the line initiated in 1986 by the General Health Law and has been a driving force for psychiatric reform and the loss of the centrality of psychiatric hospitals in the care of serious mental disorders. Currently the development of care mechanisms, despite a great development in recent years, still does not cover the existing needs and there is a significant regional unbalance. The Strategy is a document which establishes a set of minimum requirements, agreed by the 17 autonomous regions, but which requires the continued support and investment of resources for its adequate implementation.

### How the recession affects the mental health sector in Spain

- An increase in social needs has been detected following the recession, which manifests itself in a growing demand from users with serious mental illness, because of social needs related to housing, maintenance and care, as well as a limitation of the families' ability to support.
- There has been a reduction in public and private funds (from donors and companies) for mental health, as a cutback due to the recession. An argument for cost-cutting is becoming widespread, which compromises the viability of projects already started and above all direct care, which in turn compromises the approach to new necessities and the maintenance of preventative, formative and research strategies.

- The high dependency on public financing sources and the financial weakness of entities in the service sector that work in mental health is a factor of great vulnerability which puts at risk the continuity and viability of a large number of entities facing a decrease in income. The delays in payments linked to subsidies from public administrations jeopardise the treasuries of many organisations.
- There are difficulties in taking on new investments, which will limit growth in the sector in the coming years, as well as problems for the organisations to address the investments already made.
- Also a backward step or questioning of the support given to psychosocial rehabilitation programmes for people with serious mental illness that require personalised and long-lasting treatment has been noted, when faced with urgent and short-term treatments, looking more at the possible short-term impact.
- With regard to the taking up of long-term projects, a backward step has become evident before the need to resolve the immediacy of the growing social and healthcare needs.
- The campaigns fighting stigma which have been implemented in recent years are currently seen to be affected and their decrease in numbers is notable.
- Likewise, due to the current situation, the process of disinstitutionalisation and intervention at community level has been jeopardised faced with budgetary cutbacks, which will not allow for the creation of new resources and could lead to the inverse process of return to the institutionalisation of a large number of people with serious mental illness.
- Finally the economic situation and the increase in unemployment are creating serious difficulties for job opportunities, which represent a principal objective for the integration of this collective.

### **Key recommendations for national and European policy-makers**

We recommend the following:

- The promotion of structural and universal actions that guarantee a high quality and sustainable social health model for the treatment of mental health, that accompany urgent measures linked to meeting the basic needs of employment, housing and maintenance.
- The development of a new more egalitarian and inclusive social model in which the non-profit sector is an essential actor, due to its role in the attention of those most vulnerable, such as people with serious mental illness, and due to its fight against geographical inequalities given its links to the necessities of the territory in which it operates.
- Positive discrimination measures for especially vulnerable collectives such as people with severe mental illness, because it is a collective without voice.
- Implementation and development of a universal strategy for the employment of people with disability, considering the particular vulnerability in the labour market of people with severe mental illness, through measures that guarantee accessibility to employment.

- Support the creation and maintenance of national and international collaboration networks in R&D&I, quality of health and social services in the treatment of mental health.
- Strengthen the role of the non-profit services sector in the Network of Services of the System for the Autonomy and Attention of Dependency, which will favour the creation and consolidation of organisations, the creation of employment and the promotion of quality in the treatment of people with serious mental illness who find themselves in a situation of dependency.
- Measures of support to the network of organisations in the non-profit sector that, in times of recession, due to their ability to adapt to changing circumstances and precarious situations, carry out a role of support for the most basic needs, being providers of personalised and long-term resources.
- The implementation of preventative (not just palliative) measures in mental health through the promotion of research in this field, quality in the provision of services and the training of professionals.
- The maintenance of rehabilitation and psychosocial support programmes, which have demonstrated their effectiveness and economic savings when compared with healthcare through hospitalisation.
- The strengthening of the Mental Health Network especially in times of recession, bearing in mind that the lack of resources in families that did not previously find themselves in a situation of social exclusion generates psycho-emotional situations and vulnerability to stress which can cause serious psychiatric and psychological problems.
- The appreciation of mental health as the centre of quality of life for individuals and society, and as a key factor to achieve the objectives of the EU in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy and its recent revision for a sustainable development. Prevention, early detection and treatment limit the personal, economic and social consequences of mental disorders.
- To get to the point where the much sought-after European cohesion extends itself to national level, guaranteeing minimum standards for the regions with regard to health, social and employment services available to a user, regardless of where he lives. This would facilitate the functional and geographical mobility of users and patients and of human resources, therefore optimising the workforce in the sector.
- The effective implementation of the European Pact for Mental Health and Well-being at European and the national level