



MENTAL HEALTH EUROPE – SANTE MENTALE EUROPE aisbl  
Boulevard Clovis 7, B-1000 Brussels  
Tel +32 2 280 04 68 - Fax +32 2 280 16 04  
E-Mail: [info@mhe-sme.org](mailto:info@mhe-sme.org)  
[www.mhe-sme.org](http://www.mhe-sme.org)

EPHA Conference: "Health in the Enlarged EU"  
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Mental Health Europe & Feantsa Workshop:

Barriers preventing access to health services for people with mental health problems

This workshop was co-organised by Mental Health Europe and FEANTSA.  
This brief report contains the following elements:

- workshop Description;
- presentation made by Preben Brandt;
- Presentation made by Mary Van Dievel;
- Presentation made by Dearbhal Murphy;
- Findings and recommendations from the workshop discussion in relation to access to mental health in the new Member States.

Workshop Description:

This workshop was based on the EU project "*Harassment and discrimination faced by people with mental health problems in health services*" carried out by Mental Health Europe in 2003-2004 and on FEANTSA's 2006 annual theme "*The Right to Health is a Human Right: ensuring access to health for people who are homeless*". This issue was placed in the general context of the future EU strategy on mental health and the role it might play in driving the work on improving access to mental health services forward.

The overall aim of MHE's project was to raise awareness about the discrimination faced by these people and to promote strategies to combat it. Every day, people affected by mental health problems, as well as carers and relatives, face harassment and discrimination in diverse areas of their lives. This reduces the possibility of their recovery and re-integration in society. A number of Policy Recommendations were developed. These are based on the opinions of the national partners and the European Network of (ex-)users and survivors of psychiatry, and are inspired by the results of the focus groups that were held during the first year with mental health service users together with health professionals.

The overall aim of FEANTSA's annual theme was to take a close look at the access to health that people who are homeless in Europe, in light of their generally very bad health situation and the problem of complex and multiple needs. Mental health problems are a major health issue for people who are homeless and can be a significant pathway into homelessness and a barrier to moving on out of homelessness. Homeless people can be a hard to reach group.

It was clear from the reports received by FEANTSA that mental health services across the EU are failing to meet the needs of homeless people. The research carried out through FEANTSA's members highlighted a number of important structural problems in relation to mental health services for people who are homeless and raised important issues such as: the role of outreach psychiatry for people who are homeless, the danger of homelessness arising from deinstitutionalisation, dual diagnosis etc.

The objective of the workshop was to examine the findings of the work carried out by MHE and FEANTSA and to look at its relevance for the new Member States. It was an opportunity to examine whether the Policy Recommendations arising from MHE's project, which were made by people and organisations in the so-called "old" EU Member States, could also be used and prove useful in the new EU Member States. The mental health problems of people who are homeless can be placed in the context of the particular situation of homeless people in new member states, to examine how the barrier they face can best be approached.

### **Speakers:**

- Preben Brandt: *Short presentation of the European context: Update on the state of play with the future European Strategy on Mental health – Evaluation of the possibilities and areas for action in relation to the mental health of vulnerable groups within a European framework.*
- Mary Van Dievel, MHE: *Presentation of the MHE project and its findings and recommendations.*
- Dearbhal Murphy, FEANTSA: *Presentation of FEANTSA's findings and recommendations in relation to mental health and homelessness and access to services for people who are homeless.*

### **Presentation Preben Brandt:**

Preben Brandt drew on his experience on working in Denmark for his organisation Projekt Udenfor and in Mental Health Europe in his presentation.

### **Main recommendations emerging from Preben Brandt's Presentation:**

- Mental health needs differ in different social groups and relate to economic inequalities. Some people, particularly in marginal situations, may have a range of mental health and social problems. To work with excluded groups you have to engage with the whole of their situation.
- The complex problems that they present with require a specialized and multi-disciplinary response across health and social sectors.
- These joined-up and specialised responses should be part of the mainstream system.
- Outreach, outpatient and clinical based responses are needed.
- Co-working across sectors and supporting patients to engage with other sectors is vital.
- Participation of people with mental health problems is vital to ensure that services truly meet their needs.

- New policies and ways of thinking are needed. It is necessary to go beyond just medical treatment.
- There has to be a focus on prevention as well as on treatment.

## Presentation Mary Van Dievel

Mary Van Dievel, Director of Mental Health Europe, presented the background and the findings emerging from MHE's project on *"Harassment and discrimination faced by people with mental health problems in health services"*.

Main recommendations emerging from Mary Van Dievel's presentation:

- Image building and awareness raising is necessary to change perceptions of people with mental health problems.
- User and ex-user movements need to be supported and promoted.
- Training and sensitisation of health professionals is needed to ensure that they engage with people with mental health problems without discrimination and hostility.
- Laws and standards on discrimination need to be applied in the mental health sector.
- There is a need for involvement of policy makers.
- Quality standards, for example in relation to handling of medical records, are needed.
- Discrimination in relation to access to health insurance is also something that needs to be tackled.

## Presentation Dearbhal Murphy

Dearbhal Murphy drew on the work of FEANTSA during in its annual theme entitled *"The Right to Health is a Human Right: Ensuring Access to Health for People who are Homeless"*.

Issues and recommendations emerging from Dearbhal Murphy's presentation:

1. Challenges to break down barriers to mental health care for homeless people:
  - Alternative routes into care and tailoring care to meet multiple needs, dual diagnosis
  - Overcoming financial barriers
  - Using the potential of homeless services as mediator and partner
2. Some particular challenges in new Member States:
  - The healthcare system under strain
  - Little will to invest in expensive, tailored services and the pressure to reform can mean the introduction of higher co-payments, making healthcare less accessible for vulnerable groups that need it most
  - Deinstitutionalisation: without adequate provisions and good services, it can be a pathway into homelessness
  - Making social reintegration part of the approach to mental health
  - Not to lose the focus on "talking therapies" with greater availability of new drugs for mental health problems
  - Dilapidated housing stocks and the health challenges that they pose

## Findings and recommendations from the workshop discussion

The workshop discussion drew on the presentations that had been made and the issues that had been raised to focus more closely on the challenges facing the new member states of the EU in relation to access to mental health care. There were health sector professionals from Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland and Cyprus present at the workshop who fed the experience in their countries into to the debate.

Main challenges and recommendations for the future in relation to access to mental health in the new Member States:

- The difficult challenge of moving from psychiatric hospital based to community based care. There is a need for investment, for training to operate in the new frameworks and for careful attention to geographical distribution of the new structures.
- There is the challenge of using the good examples from, and avoiding the pitfalls encountered, in the old Member States.
- There is a challenge in moving away from the old role of psychiatry as a tool of state policy to engaging with people with mental health problems in a new way.
- There is the challenge of implementing rights-based approaches and legislation that are being developed and have been adopted in some places.
- There is a need to work on changing attitudes and raising awareness in society in order to move on from stigma and discrimination against people with mental health problems.
- There is a need to make this focus a part of the work to modernise healthcare systems, which are under major strain in many of the new Member States. The challenge is a major financial one.
- In some Member States there is a need to work on the recognition of some mental health problems as a disability for which a disability allowance must be made available. This has a major impact on the lives of people with disabling mental health problems who are unable to get access to the financial support that they need.
- "Brain drain" – the loss of qualified professionals through migration – is a huge and growing problem in the social and health sectors in the new Member States.
- Cross-sectoral cooperation and working is an important part of developing a coherent and joined-up strategy on mental health and needs to happen at all levels from Ministry to grass-roots.
- There is a need to ensure that these issues are taken forward in the future EU strategy on mental health.
- They also need to be highlighted in the European processes on social inclusion.

