



MHE Position on the EC Green Paper on Mental Health

An EU Strategy on Mental Health and Well Being

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Mental Health Europe (MHE) welcomes this consultation process as a golden opportunity for influencing the discussion of mental health issues at European level.

MHE has invited as many organisations and people as possible to have their say and to comment on the Green Paper on Mental Health. This document aims at providing an overview of the responses that MHE has received from its member organisations and individual members.

Mental Health Europe would like to offer the following comments on the Green Paper on Mental Health:

(1) How relevant is the mental health of the population for the EU's strategic policy objectives, as detailed in section 1?

An EU Strategy on Mental Health and Well Being

MHE welcomes the objectives of the Green Paper and strongly believes that the EU needs to develop a comprehensive strategy on the mental health of the population.

In particular, MHE would like to comment on the title of the proposed Strategy by introducing the title of **“EU Strategy on Mental Health and Well Being”** for all populations.

The major justification for a change of the title is the uncertainty regarding the competence of the EC in Public Health matters.

MHE believes it is important to ensure a **public health approach to positive mental health** for all populations in the Member States of the EU. An EU strategy focusing instead on the burden of mental disorders will lead to neglect the importance of the key competencies of the EU in public health promotion of positive mental health and well being and the prevention of mental disorders.

MHE also notes that medical models of mental health are still dominant in some EU countries and may obscure the social causes and contexts of mental distress. **‘Mental well-being’** is a more useful term to use than ‘mental (ill) health’ as it is something that all European citizens can readily relate to their own lives and experiences. There is an urgent need to improve mental health

and well-being for all as well as to improve the quality of life for those experiencing mental illness or distress.

(2) Would the development of a comprehensive EU-strategy on mental health add value to the existing and envisaged actions and does section 5 propose adequate priorities?

MHE believes that a holistic and more coherent approach to public mental health will add value to existing and envisaged initiatives.

MHE endorses the priorities set out in section 5 and makes the following considerations:

Creating a cooperation framework between Member States

MHE believes that the EU strategy must ensure that due regard is given to the enormous diversity of the EU population. When developing a European framework on mental health more attention needs to be paid to the main differences between national health systems across the EU.

Increasing the coherence of actions in different policy sectors

MHE believes that it is fundamental to advance the coordination between different policies in the field of mental health both at EU and national level.

MHE makes a strong plea for an internal mechanism within the EC for linking the various Directorates General and structures in the EC which would have a direct relevance to the forthcoming EU strategy on mental health and well being. The strategy should give emphasis also to the linkages necessary within the EC between mental health and well being and the strategy on reducing alcohol harm and the EU Drug strategy.

MHE calls on an EU strategy on mental health and well being to be linked with the WHO/Euro Action Plan on Mental Health as well as with the European Network of Health Promoting Schools and the WHO Health Promoting Hospitals Network.

A EU Platform on Mental Health and Well Being

MHE would welcome the launch of an EU Platform on Mental Health and Well Being which would represent a wide base of interests from many stakeholders - including patients, carers and civil society organisations, many of which are already represented in the Europe wide and multi sectoral membership of Mental Health Europe.

A dialogue between member states would help to ensure a shared vision of mental health and well being.

(3) Are the initiatives proposed in sections 6 and 7 appropriate to support the coordination between Member States, to promote the integration of mental health into the health and non-health policies and stakeholder action, and to better liaise research and policy on mental health aspects?

MHE believes that the initiatives proposed in sections 6 and 7 are appropriate and would like to put forward some recommendations:

A Council Recommendation on Mental Health and Well Being

MHE supports the EC proposal for a Council Recommendation on Mental Health and would encourage the Commission to mention Mental Health and Well Being in the title of the Recommendation.

A Council Recommendation would need to include, as well as all the areas covered in the Green Paper, a substantial input from those who have experienced mental distress.

A Council Recommendation on Depression and Suicide

MHE welcomes the proposal for a Council recommendation on reduction of depression and suicidal behaviour, as this will encourage the member states to take initiatives and cooperate in such area.

Promoting Social Inclusion and protecting Human Rights

MHE believes that the matter of identifying best practice for social inclusion and human rights for people with mental health problems carries an explicit need for close links between DG Sanco and DG Employment and Social Affairs.

MHE welcomes the proposal in the Green Paper to include people with mental ill health or disability and the situation in psychiatric institutions in the activities of the Fundamental Rights Agency.

Raising awareness on Mental Health and Well Being in the EU

The EU strategy should put in place specific, easily accessible channels whereby people with experience of mental distress can contribute to the development and implementation of a mental health strategy.

Raising awareness campaigns are needed to reduce stigma and the negative image of people with mental health problems and disabilities as it is frequently presented in the media.

Liaison between Policy and Research

MHE supports the development of an interface between Research and Policy in the field of mental health and well being. A number of EU institutions could potentially play a role in data analysis and policy development.