Summary

The need for action on mental health

Positive mental health is an integral part of the health and well-being of the citizens of Europe and a prerequisite for a viable, socially responsible and productive Europe; it enhances social cohesion and social capital and improves safety in the living environment. A lack of positive mental health accounts for one quarter of all European ill-health and premature death, costing countries between 3% and 4% of gross national product. Positive mental health cannot be gained by treating mental disorders alone; it is everybody’s business and an issue for the criminal justice, education, environment and urban planning, finance, housing, labour, and social welfare sectors. Mental health promotion and mental disorder prevention can lead to health, social and economic gain, increases in social inclusion and economic productivity, reductions in the risk for mental and behavioural disorders and decreases in social welfare and health care costs.

Develop country based action plans for mental health promotion and mental disorder prevention

Each country should develop and implement a comprehensive action plan for mental health promotion and mental disorder prevention, as a principal mechanism to promote mental health, to reduce the enormous health and economic burden of mental disorders and to reinforce social cohesion. Where sufficient funds for implementation are not secured, they could be identified through a special Mental Health Fund financed by earmarked tobacco and alcohol taxes. Action plans should pay attention to the ten action areas and five common principles outlined below.

Ten action areas

1. Support parenting and the early years of life
   Home based interventions for pregnant women that include education on health behaviour, parenting skills and mother-baby interaction should be implemented for high risk populations. This will enable a healthy start in life, leading to positive developments that reach through to adulthood.
2. **Promote mental health in schools**
   Mental health promotion components should be integrated into school health promotion initiatives, including the WHO Network for Health Promoting Schools. This will increase the positive influence that schools can have on the behaviour, mental health and development of children and adolescents.

3. **Promote workplace mental health**
   Engagement should be made with the labour sector to support the promotion of training, employment and improved social inclusion of those who have experienced less favourable conditions earlier in life. The creation of healthy companies and workplaces, which include mentally healthy working practices, should be encouraged. These will lead to more and healthier jobs and reduce work related stress.

4. **Support mentally healthy ageing**
   Community participation, social support networks and labour policy should be developed to encourage the ongoing social, cultural, economic and political contribution of older persons in society. This will mitigate against the increased risk of mental illness, for example depression, whose burden is likely to increase with an ageing population.

5. **Address groups at risk for mental disorders**
   Tool kits of available evidence based preventive interventions for different groups identified at risk for mental disorders should be prepared to support implementation by a range of providers. Toolkits can include depression prevention for carers or for patients with long-term illness, and plans for emergency preparedness in case of major disasters. Targeting groups at risk can reduce the excess health and social welfare costs that may arise.

6. **Prevent depression and suicide**
   Prevention of depression based on cognitive behavioural models should be implemented for children and adolescents at risk. Health care providers in primary care should be trained to diagnose and treat depression and to recognize suicidal risk. Environmental measures to reduce access to means of suicide should be supported. These interventions will reduce both depression, the second top cause of disability in Europe, and suicide, which is the highest in the world and 80% higher in the ten new Member States than in the old fifteen.
7. **Prevent violence and harmful substance use**
   Comprehensive and coordinated policies and actions should be made at the country, regional and local levels, to reduce the everyday violence, especially against women, children and young people that occurs particularly in neighbourhoods with high rates of social exclusion. Action should be taken on drinking environments and the ready availability of alcohol to reduce the intentional and unintentional injuries and violence that result from alcohol intoxication.

8. **Involve primary and secondary health care**
   Education and training on screening and brief interventions for emotional problems, mental disorders and harmful substance use should be provided to health care professionals, particularly those working in primary care, and should be supported by incentive mechanisms for implementation. Widespread implementation could reduce the current burden of depression by one fifth, and the current burden of alcohol use disorders by one sixth.

9. **Reduce disadvantage and prevent stigma**
   Engagement should be made with social inclusion units and other sectors to implement policies and community development programmes to protect vulnerable groups from discrimination, stigma and social exclusion, and to reduce the impact that lack of income, education and disadvantage have on the risk for mental disorders.

10. **Link with other sectors**
    Specific collaborative initiatives should be made with other sectors such as environment and urban planning, social welfare, labour, education, criminal justice, nutrition, transport and human rights protection. Mental health promotion components should be integrated into existing health promotion and public health policies and programmes of the European Commission and the different WHO Health Promoting Networks. This will promote mental health, prevent mental disorders and increase the visibility of the impact of other policies on mental health.
Five common principles

1. Expand the knowledge base for mental health
   The knowledge base for mental health should be translated into practical toolkits and guidelines to make use of existing and new evidence from research in daily practice. The operational definitions of mental health indicators in the European Community Health Indicators and the European Health Promotion Indicators projects should be strengthened, including indicators for policies and infrastructures. Mental health surveys should be carried out, at least every two years.

2. Support effective implementation
   Country and, where relevant, local community, municipal and regional coordinating mechanisms and focal points or centres for mental health promotion and mental disorder prevention should be established and supported by resources, personnel and infrastructures that are commensurate with the size of the burden of mental and behavioural disorders and that reflect the priorities identified in the developed action plans.

3. Build capacity and train the workforce
   Professionals in public health and other sectors should receive education and training to prepare them to act as enablers, mediators and advocates for mental health in all sectors, to work with a broad set of partners in society, and to recognize the importance and benefit of multi-sectoral policies and actions for population mental health.

4. Engage different actors
   Structures and processes should be ensured at all levels to facilitate the harmonized collaboration of all actors and sectors in mental health development, to strengthen existing partnerships for mental health and social development, such as the networks of cities, schools and workplaces, to support and strengthen the roles and responsibilities of non-governmental organizations, and to disseminate information to other sectors on the multiple health, social and economic gains to be made in mental health.
5. Evaluate policy and programme impact

At least 10% of implementation budgets should be dedicated to monitoring and evaluating the impact of implemented policies and programmes. Results should be incorporated in revisions of improved policies and programmes. Policies and programmes should be supported by regular mental health audits and mental health impact assessments, in both health and non-health sector policies and programmes, to ensure accountability for mental health of all sectors of society.
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Members of the Policy task force

Dr. Athanassios Constantopoulos
Centre for Mental Health
Greece

Professor Czeslaw Czabala
Institute of Psychiatry and Neurology
Poland

Mr. John Kenneth Davies MA
International Union for Health Promotion
and Education (IUHPE)
United Kingdom

Dr. John Henderson
Mental Health Europe
Belgium

Professor Lars Jacobsson
WHO Collaboration Centre for Research and
Training in Mental Health
Department of Psychiatry,
University of Umea
Sweden

Dr. Maria Joao Heitor dos Santos
Directorate General of Health
Portugal

Professor Maurice Mittelmark
Department of Education and Health
Promotion
Research Centre for Health Promotion
University of Bergen
Norway

Associate Professor Dainius Puras
Centre of Child Psychiatry and Social
Paediatrics
Clinic of Psychiatry
Vilnius University
Lithuania
Members of the Training and Database task forces

**Dr. Margaret Barry**
Department of Health Promotion,
National University of Ireland, Galway
Ireland

**Professor Josipa Basic**
Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, University of Zagreb
Croatia

**Dr. Hartmut Berger**
European Network of Health Promoting Hospitals (ENHPH)
Germany

**Ms. Elizabeth Gale**
Mentality
United Kingdom

**Dr. Ines Garcia Sanchez**
Andalusian School of Public Health
Spain

**Ms. Emma Hogg**
NHS Health Scotland
Scotland

**Professor Clemens Hosman**
Department of Clinical Psychology,
Radboud University Nijmegen
The Netherlands

**Dr. Karl Kuhn**
Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (FIOSH)
European Network of Workplace Health Promotion (ENWHP)
Germany

**Dr. Beatrice Lamboy**
National Institute for Prevention and Health Education (INPES)
France

**Dr. Andrej Marusic**
Institute of Public Health of the Republic of Slovenia
Slovenia

**Professor Juergen M. Pelikan**
Ludwig-Boltzmann-Institute for Sociology of Health and Medicine
Institute of Sociology, University of Vienna
Austria

**Professor Mirella Ruggeri**
Department of Medicine and Public Health
University of Verona
Italy

**Dr. Marco Stegagno**
Department of Medicine and Public Health
University of Verona
Italy

**Professor Airi Varnik**
Estonian-Swedish Institute of Suicidology
Estonia

**Professor Kristian Wahlbeck**
National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES), Mental Health Unit
Finland
To ensure that mental health is a global public good, and to reduce the enormous health and economic burden of mental disorders, each European country should develop and implement a comprehensive action plan for mental health promotion and mental disorder prevention, paying attention to the following ten action areas and five common principles:

Ten action areas
1. Support parenting and the early years of life
2. Promote mental health in schools
3. Promote workplace mental health
4. Support mentally healthy ageing
5. Address groups at risk for mental disorders
6. Prevent depression and suicide
7. Prevent violence and harmful substance use
8. Involve primary and secondary health care
9. Reduce disadvantage and prevent stigma
10. Link with other sectors

Five common principles
1. Expand the knowledge base for mental health
2. Support effective implementation
3. Build capacity and train the workforce
4. Engage different actors
5. Evaluate policy and programme impact

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