



PRESS RELEASE

Positive mental health is key to active and healthy ageing

Brussels 8th February 2017 – [Mental Health Europe](#) together with Member of the European Parliament Deirdre Clune (Ireland, EPP) held a successful event in the European Parliament yesterday to discuss the importance of active ageing and why it matters to mental health. With more than 50 people in the room, the event gathered experts and policy makers including the Irish Minister for Mental Health and Older People Helen Mc Entee. The overall message coming out from the event was positive and full of hope: demographics are changing, life expectancy rises, but ageing should not be seen as a burden for society but as an opportunity.

While population ageing is one of the greatest social and economic challenges facing Europe today, it is crucial for Member States to address its implications on health and particularly mental health in a holistic and positive manner. Changes in lifestyle, anxiety about the future and increased proportion of physical health conditions with age have undeniable impact on the mental health of individuals. The alarming levels of suicides among older persons particularly at time of retirement or when a person becomes dependent on other people must be addressed since depression should not be seen as a normality for older people. Everyone should enjoy the right to participate in society in a meaningful way at all ages. As Minister Helen Mc Entee said *“older people are entitled to the same rights than everyone else and in order to make this a reality we must ensure a whole-of-society and government approach”*.

Johan Ten Geuzendam from the European Commission shared insights on existing European and international frameworks supporting age and mental health friendly policies including Article 25 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights on the rights of the elderly, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, the EU Cross-border Healthcare Directive, the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities as well as the World Health Organization Global Strategy on Ageing and Health.

Nigel Henderson, President of Mental Health Europe highlighted that *“we are all living longer but not always better lives. Increase in life expectancy is a reality across the EU, we need to start preparing for longer lives earlier”*. Being prepared will be possible only through the implementation of age-friendly policies ensuring the social inclusion of older people through participation in society and inclusion in the community. It is widely acknowledged that active ageing contributes to the well-being and positive mental health of people throughout their life.

The active participation in the labour market of people aged 55–64 is on the rise and active and healthy ageing is not only a necessity but a reality. Brenda O’Brien from the European Agency for Safety at Work insisted on the need to focus on healthy workplaces for all ages and called for every employer to assess the risk factors for health in the workplace including psychosocial risks factors. As Ms O’Brien explained *“stress and stress related ill health are the second biggest reason why people are absent from work for longer than three days”*.

Among the many recommendations expressed by speakers and participants can be mentioned the need for training of geriatricians, general practitioners as well service providers to mental health issues. More information about possible side effects of medication for older people that have implications on mental health should also be provided.

Experts emphasised the importance of developing age-friendly policies and integrated strategies in collaboration with organisations representing older persons and mental health associations, calling for more joint thinking and budgetary integration between occupational health and safety, employment and health policies at national and European level.

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More recommendations are included in the presentations and position paper below:

To download speakers' presentations please click [here](#)

To read MHE's 2014 position paper on mental health and ageing click [here](#)

About Mental Health Europe

Mental Health Europe is an umbrella organisation which represents associations, organisations and individuals active in the field of mental health and well-being in Europe, including service providers, (ex)users of mental health services, volunteers and professionals. As such, MHE bridges the gap between its 75 member organisations and the European institutions, and keeps its members informed and involved in any developments at European Union level. Find further information about us:

www.mhe-sme.org

www.eachofus.eu

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