Mental Health Europe

Equal rights.
Better mental health.
For all.

March 2023

Mental Health Europe Responses

Public debate on the EU's future health priorities: Stakeholder Survey

Mental Health must remain a priority for the EU – a call to action.

A [survey](#) to help determine the EU's priorities on health for 2024-2029 has been launched. It presents nine potential topics, but does not mention mental health.

This is a major oversight.

Mental Health Europe has responded to the survey stressing the need for mental health to be prioritised, and encourages its members and sister organisations to do the same.

Ignoring mental health means ignoring citizens' calls for action made during the conference on the Future of Europe, the pledge on mental health made by Commission President von der Leyen, and the commitments made in the European Commission Communication on a Comprehensive approach to mental health. It undermines the progress made over the last few years, and removes policymaking from the needs and priorities of the people's of Europe.

Citizen demands for action are unlikely to decrease: 89% of Europeans think that mental health is as important as physical health, yet 54% of them say that their mental health needs are unmet. 62% of EU citizens think that recent world events (the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the climate crisis, unemployment, and the food and energy costs) affect their mental health. Mental Health should be an integral part of the future health plans of the EU.[1]

The survey and further information about the debate, organised by the European Observatory on health systems and policies and the European Commission's DG SANTE, is available at

https://eurohealthobservatory.who.int/themes/observatory-programmes/governance/eu-and-health-priorities

Mental Health Europe's responses can be found below.

---

[1] https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3032

Which actions should the EU pursue with regards to these priority topics? How can the EU support and be of added value to Member States?

*Please refer to the Observatory [briefing papers](#) for more information on the individual topics, which are briefly outlined below. You can provide inputs for **one or more** of the priority topics in the text boxes provided (maximum 1000 characters per topic).*

Enhancing health security

What is it about? *Ensuring protection of people's health through prevention of, detection of, and response against threats or events that could harm it, including (re-) emerging infectious diseases, bioterrorism and natural disasters.*

There is no mention of mental health or psychosocial risks in this briefing note. This omission is concerning given the commitment taken by the EU to put mental health on par with physical health in the Communication on a Comprehensive approach to mental health and adopting a mental health in all policies approach. 89% of Europeans think that mental health is as important as physical health, yet 54% of them declare that their mental health needs are unmet. This proves the necessity of going further on mental health in the next mandate with a Long term commitment on Mental Health with proper targets, indicators, and funding attached. Mental Health should be an integral part of health security preparedness. 62% of EU citizens think that recent world events (the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the climate crisis, unemployment, and the food and energy costs) "somewhat" or "greatly" affected their mental health. Mental Health should be an integral part of the future health security plans of the EU.

Addressing the determinants of health through Health in All Policies and Health for All Policies

What is it about? *Adopting systematic approaches that direct policies towards health and maximise efforts to promote (or at least) avoid damaging health (Health in All Policies), as well as highlighting ways, in which health can contribute to other agendas (Health for All Policies).*

There is no mention of mental health or psychosocial risks in this briefing note. This omission is concerning given the commitment taken by the EU to put mental health on par with physical health in the Communication and adopting a mental health in all policies approach. This proves the necessity of going further on mental health in the next mandate with a Long term commitment on Mental Health with proper targets, indicators and funding attached. A comprehensive understanding of mental health

sees a mental health-in-all-policies approach as essential to protect and improve mental wellbeing. Whereby actions are taken to address mental health within and beyond the health sector, focusing on promotion and prevention. Policies in different areas can impact positively on mental health, by strengthening protective factors and mitigating risk factors. This approach was called for last year by 78 organisations and 25 individuals in a joint statement led by Mental Health Europe. 'A Mental health in All Policies approach as key component of any comprehensive initiative on mental health' https://www.mentalhealtheurope.org/library/join-the-mental-health-in-all-policies-stakeholders-network/

Supporting health system transformation

What is it about? *Transforming health systems to meet new challenges and rising demands, which may require implementing different types of innovations. This process can be facilitated by supportive framework conditions, including targeted resources, political commitment, and sustained investment.*

There is no mention of mental health in this briefing note. This is concerning given the commitment taken by the EU to put mental health on par with physical health in the Communication on a Comprehensive approach to mental health and adopting a mental health in all policies approach. 89% of Europeans think that mental health is as important as physical health yet, 54% of them declare that their mental health needs are unmet. This proves the necessity of going further on mental health in the next mandate with a long term commitment on Mental Health with proper targets, indicators, and funding attached. Health system transformation should contribute to support EU member states into adopting the psychosocial model of mental health. This transformation calls for co-creation as a pathway, moving away from systems of non-participation and tokenism, towards one which is based on collaboration, partnership, and understanding of need, while addressing potential conflict of interest, particularly commercial interests, in this process.

Enhancing the labour market for health and care workers

What is it about? *Enhancing the working and framework conditions for health and care workers to counteract health worker shortages, medical deserts, attrition, and skill gaps, which are issues most countries are currently dealing with, and which will likely be exacerbated by an ageing health workforce.*

There is no mention of mental health or psychosocial risks in this briefing note. This is concerning given the commitment taken by the EU to put mental health on par with physical health in the Communication and to a mental health in all policies approach. This proves the necessity of going further on mental health in the next mandate with a long term commitment on Mental Health with

proper targets, indicators and funding attached. Low wages, irregular and/or longer working hours, shift work, heavy workload, stressful working conditions, and exposure to adverse social behaviours, are all risk factors for mental health. Policies and care frameworks should be put in place to improve wages and working conditions, standards of occupational health and safety should include measures to improve psychosocial wellbeing, and training to health and care workers should be provided. Any EU actions on the healthcare workforce must be in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Achieving universal health coverage

What is it about? *Ensuring people have access to quality healthcare without facing financial hardship. Much progress has been made in European countries, but gaps in coverage and access still exist in many settings.*

There is no mention of mental health or psychosocial risks in this briefing note. This omission is concerning given the commitment taken by the EU to put mental health on par with physical health in the Communication and adopting a mental health in all policies approach. This proves the necessity of going further on mental health in the next mandate with a long term commitment on Mental Health with proper targets, indicators and funding attached. Achieving universal health coverage would not be complete without the inclusion of mental health in this coverage. Stigma and discrimination surrounding mental health remains pervasive, hindering support, understanding, and inclusion and should be tackled in addition to financial barriers to ensure effective access. Universal coverage should include everyone regardless of their age, gender, disability, or residence status.

Implementing digital solutions and AI

What is it about? *Maximising positive health outcomes and gains for healthcare delivery from using digital health solutions and artificial intelligence, while successfully mitigating risks and ensuring their safe use.*

There is no mention of mental health or psychosocial risks in this briefing note. This is concerning given the commitment taken by the EU to put mental health on par with physical health in the Communication and to a mental health in all policies approach. This proves the need in the next mandate for a long-term action on Mental Health with proper targets, indicators and funding attached. From telehealth and mental health apps, tools emerged for assessment, support, and care as both opportunities and threats. It opened the door to business models driven by profit rather than a commitment to wellbeing. A robust regulatory framework is required. Mental Health Europe's report on digitalisation stresses the need to craft policies and regulations maximising the opportunities digitalisation offers while mitigating risks especially for people in vulnerable situations. 'Safety & Quality', 'Equity', and 'Going beyond technology: framing mental health in a bigger picture' are pivotal priorities.

Improving the performance and resilience of health systems

What is it about? *Strengthening the resilience and performance of health systems to maximise health outcomes and ensure health systems can rapidly adapt and meet their goals, including quality, access, equity, responsiveness, health improvement, people-centredness and financial protection.*

There is no mention of mental health or psychosocial risks in this briefing note. This omission is concerning given the commitment taken by the EU to put mental health on par with physical health in the Communication and adopting a mental health in all policies approach. This proves the necessity of going further on mental health in the next mandate with a Long term commitment on Mental Health with proper targets, indicators, and funding attached. For health systems resilience actions should focus on mechanisms by which harm is mitigated and prevented, rather than focusing on the aftereffects of harm. It needs to consider the social and other determinants that inform poor health outcomes. To be efficient it must include mental health while articulating an overlooked truth: that race, class, disability, gender, and sexuality, among other social identities that are used to stratify society, play a role in determining who must become resilient in the first place.

Addressing long-term challenges, such as population ageing or climate change

What is it about? *Understanding the stakes of long-term challenges such as population ageing and climate change for European health systems and building resilience to adequately detect, prepare for and act on challenges, ideally before they manifest as crises.*

There is no mention of mental health or psychosocial risks in this briefing note. This is concerning given the commitment taken by the EU to put mental health on par with physical health in the Communication and to a mental health in all policies approach. This proves the need of going further on mental health in the next mandate with a Long term commitment on Mental Health with proper targets, indicators, and funding attached. 62% of EU citizens think that recent world events "somewhat" or "greatly" affected their mental health. Climate change can affect people's mental health and psychosocial well-being differently. It can be addressed in different ways: integrate mental health psychosocial support to climate action; implement multisectoral and community-based approaches to reduce vulnerabilities and address the mental health impacts of climate change; address the large gaps that exist in funding both for mental health and for responding to the health impacts of climate change.

Question 6. Which topic outside of the discussion framework should the EU prioritise and why? Which related actions should the EU pursue to add value at EU level and to support EU Member States? (maximum 1000 characters)

According to the last Eurobarometer 89% of European believe mental health deserves the same attention as physical health. This must translate to a standalone point on mental health in this strategic health priorities. The Communication on a Comprehensive Approach to Mental Health, by committing to the parity of esteem, constitutes a first move for the EU to start answering to the acute mental health needs of the EU population and their demand for EU action. It is time to move from reaction to action. Mental Health should now be taken forward with the publication of a long-term EU Mental Health commitment with clear and time bound targets and indicators. This long-term action should be backed by adequate investment from the EU and should be drafted in consultation all relevant stakeholders. Clear indicators and monitoring framework should be developed. The long term plan should adopt the psychosocial approach to mental health and strengthen the mental health in all policies approach.