



**Mental
Health
Europe**



Open letter to World Health Organization

Denouncing the dismantling of the QualityRights Initiative: a critical setback for rights-based mental health

26 February 2026

The European Disability Forum, the European Network of (ex)-Users of Psychiatry, Mental Health Europe, the Brain Injured & Families European Confederation and the International Disability Alliance issue this public statement to express our profound concern regarding the recent closure of the World Health Organization's (WHO) **Unit on Policy, Law and Human Rights**. While we recognize the financial and structural complexities that WHO is facing, the dissolution of this specific unit represents a significant step backward for the global and European mental health policy.

For years, this Unit has been the primary engine for embedding the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD)** into global mental health frameworks. Under the dedicated leadership of Michelle Funk, supported by Natalie Drew Bold, the Unit produced transformative tools and guidance under the framework of the **WHO QualityRights Initiative**. These resources have been fundamental in moving global health systems away from coercive and rights-restrictive practices toward an approach based on autonomy, recovery and inclusion, placing human rights at the centre of mental health policy and practice and supporting an holistic understanding of mental health. The WHO QualityRights Initiative provided landmark law and policy guidance for nations to modernize their mental health legislation and practice, most notably by focusing on respect for autonomy, legal capacity and non-discrimination of persons with psychosocial disabilities.

The closure of QualityRights Initiative creates a vacuum of expertise at the exact moment many countries are in the transformative processes of aligning their legislation, policy and practices with the standards of the UN CRPD, including by accelerating deinstitutionalization.

By establishing and empowering the QualityRights Initiative, the WHO departed from its traditional biomedical discourse and created a clear institutional anchor for human rights that was led by the medical profession and meaningful participation of people with lived experience.

Without this anchor there is a danger of regression in both the quality of care and the protection of fundamental rights globally.

We call on World Health Organization to:

1. **Establish a Dedicated Focal Point:** Create a formal mechanism to ensure human rights and the UN CRPD remain integrated across all mental health sectors.
2. **Sustain the QualityRights Initiative:** Ensure that e-training and country-level implementation supports remain active and accessible.
3. **Preserve Institutional Expertise:** Retain and redeploy qualified staff to maintain continuity in global coordination.
4. **Strengthen Civil Society Engagement:** Deepen the meaningful participation of, and partnership with organizations representing persons with psychosocial disabilities in shaping future structures.
5. **Publicly Reaffirm Commitments:** Issue a clear statement that human rights and community inclusion remain central pillars of the WHO's mental health strategy.

Human rights are not an optional addition to mental health; they are interdependent and essential. The collaborative progress fostered by the QualityRights Initiative must not be lost. We remain open to a constructive dialogue with the WHO to ensure that it does not retreat from his leadership in this area.

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