



Resources for Supporting Mental Health

Among Young People in the Netherlands



Youth Leadership Programme

HOW TO NAVIGATE THIS RESOURCE GUIDE

Where to find support



Looking for resources to help yourself, a friend, or a family member? You can find various resources, such as helplines, organisations and websites here.



Key Insights



Curious about the mental health landscape in your country? Find out what young people actually need most and the biggest challenges to getting help.



Mental Health Context in the Netherlands



What are local laws and support systems? Dive into the current mental health context in your country, see what's working, and, more importantly, what's still missing.



About the Project



Discover more about the Youth Leadership Programme, funded by the Rare Impact Fund, and how young leaders created this resource in partnership with Mental Health Europe.



This reference guide was developed by Youth Ambassador Maria Schelfhout Hortet as a part of the Youth Leadership Programme. The document is a product of co-creation, researched and drafted by Youth Leaders with the guidance and editorial oversight of Mental Health Europe. The views and content expressed reflect the national perspectives, contributions, and lived experiences of these Youth Leaders.

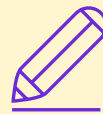
WHERE YOU CAN FIND SUPPORT

If you feel overwhelmed, anxious or lonely, support is available. The list below contains the resources we have found to contact in case of emergency.

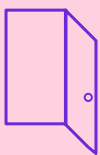
Disclaimer: The following links and helplines were gathered with the best care possible, however, as these are third-party services, we cannot guarantee their quality or that they remain accessible after the release of these documents.



Overview of available help for youth



For secondary schools



Low threshold Walk-in services



Other useful websites



For university and college students



Overview of available help for youth

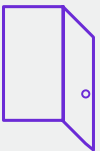


Jongerenhulponline.nl

Jongerenhulponline.nl offers:

- ➔ More than 25 helplines (chat, telephone, email).
- ➔ Free, anonymous support.
- ➔ A map with accessible drop-in centres.
- ➔ Thematic helplines for specific problems.

It is an initiative of *Alles is Gezondheid (Everything is Health)* and the *Dutch Centre for Youth Health* and is financed by public funds.



Low-threshold walk-in services



@ease

Stress, loneliness, problems at home, debt or depression: @ease offers young people aged 12 to 25 a listening ear. You talk to peers. They listen to you with an open mind. You can visit @ease or chat as often as you like. You are always welcome. Free, anonymous and no referral required.



For university and college students

Dutch Universities

➔ Many Dutch universities and colleges offer free and accessible mental health support for students. Student psychologists usually work with short-term counselling, typically 3–5 sessions, supplemented with training or referral when necessary.

➔ There is usually a short consultation first (e.g. 10–15 minutes) to determine together what suits your situation: an intake, training, individual sessions or a referral to other internal services such as welfare programmes and study advisors. When complaints are more complex or require more time, student psychologists can refer you to your general practitioner or external mental health care.

➔ At many institutions, you can directly participate in workshops and group programmes on topics such as stress, difficult thoughts, mindfulness, fear of failure, perfectionism and coping with loss.





For secondary schools



MIND Young Academy

MIND Young Academy is a programme in which young experts by experience come to schools to talk about mental health in three interactive lessons, free of charge. They share their own experiences with stress, anxiety or depression and show where pupils can find recognition and support. The lessons break taboos, increase knowledge about mental health issues and help young people recognise the signs in themselves. This encourages pupils to seek help more quickly and makes them feel safer to talk about their feelings.



Other useful websites



MoodLift

They offer anonymous online programmes that can help you improve your mood and reduce stress, for example. The website also includes an online questionnaire that focuses on mental well-being and provides feedback on how you are doing in areas such as mood and stress, as well as personal recommendations and links to free tools that can help you.



MentaalVitaal

Website and helpline with reliable and scientific information about mental health. You can chat (anonymously), email or call.



Hey, it's okay

Information about mental health issues and conversation tips (also if you are concerned about someone else)



Alles Oké? Support line

Support for anyone between the ages of 18 and 24 who is having a hard time. Free and anonymous chat and phone calls with a trained volunteer.



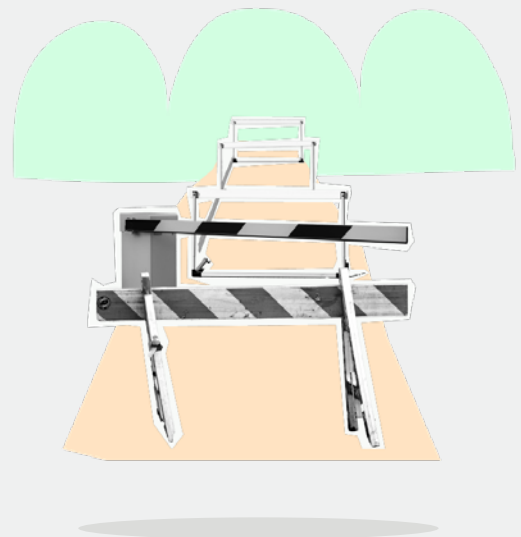
KEY INSIGHTS

HIGH PRESSURE AND SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS



Young people, and students in particular, are under great pressure to perform and meet high expectations. The fast-paced and increasingly individualistic society contributes to stress and feelings of loneliness. This constant pressure can have a significant impact on mental health, making it more difficult for young people to cope with everyday challenges.

LONG WAITING LISTS AND ACCESSIBILITY BARRIERS



Both primary and specialist mental health care in the Netherlands often involve long waiting times, sometimes up to six months to a year, which discourages young people from seeking help. This structural bottleneck leaves many feeling that support is unattainable, even when they realise they need it.

NEED FOR ACCESSIBLE SUPPORT AT COMMUNITY LEVEL AND WITH LOW THRESHOLDS

Current services are often polarised: you either see no one or you see a psychologist in a formal setting. Experts point to a gap in low-threshold community-based support, such as peer groups, coaching circles or citizen-led initiatives funded by local authorities. These programmes can create safe spaces where young people can meet, share experiences and support each other without stigma.



INFORMATION OVERLOAD AND PRESSURE TO PERFORM

Young people are often overwhelmed by the abundance of choices and responsibilities, from housing to education and career paths. This narrative of 'pressure to succeed' can cause failures or struggles to be perceived as a personal shortcoming, especially for boys, who are often more ashamed of mental health issues.



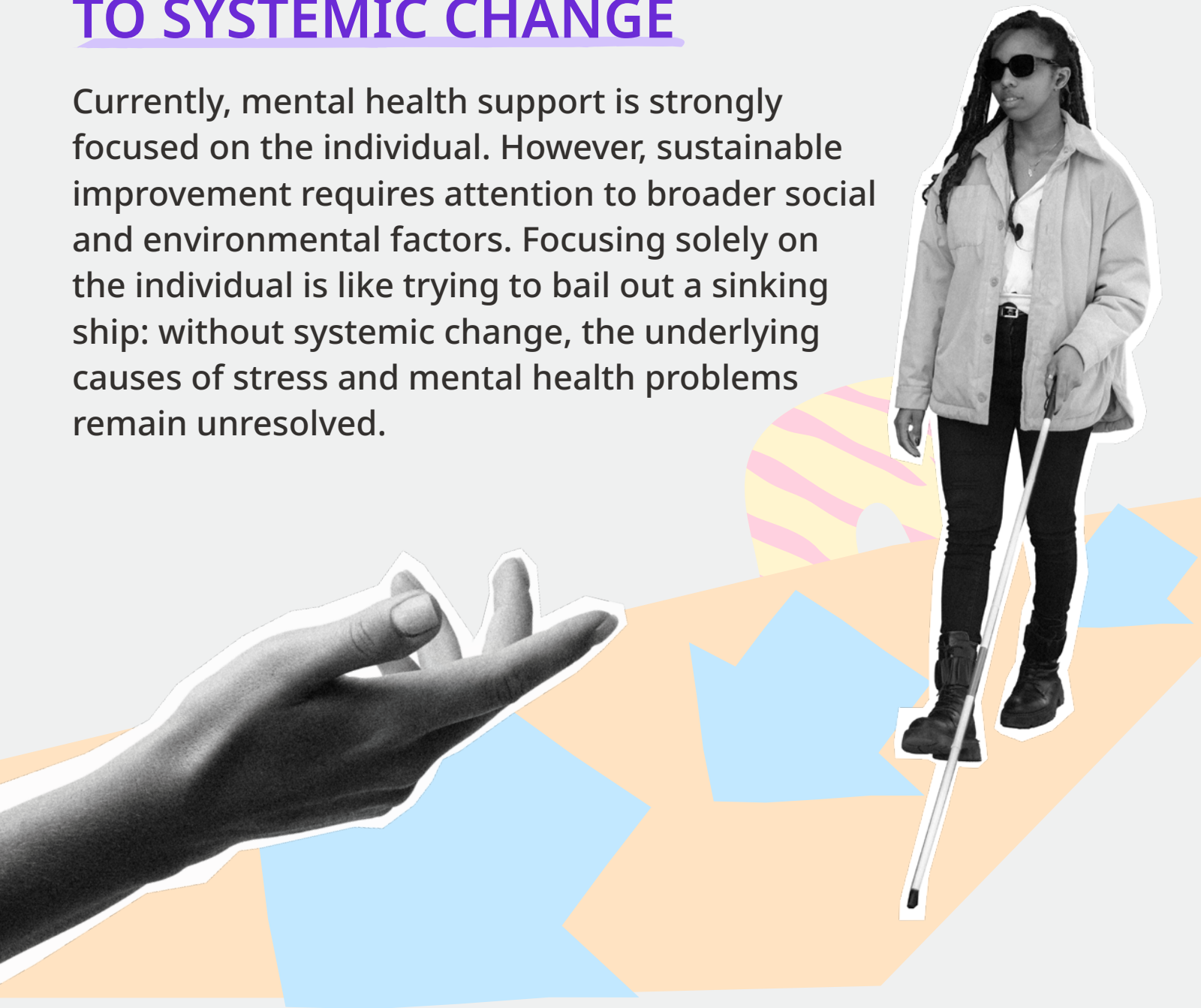
PROACTIVE PREVENTION AND HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS

Experts emphasise the importance of investing in prevention and creating healthy environments for young people's development. Opportunities for physical activity, social interaction, hobbies and skill development are essential. By incorporating mental health care into the school curriculum, on the same level as physical health, young people can acquire the knowledge they need to maintain their psychological well-being.



FROM INDIVIDUAL TREATMENT TO SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Currently, mental health support is strongly focused on the individual. However, sustainable improvement requires attention to broader social and environmental factors. Focusing solely on the individual is like trying to bail out a sinking ship: without systemic change, the underlying causes of stress and mental health problems remain unresolved.



WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?

Your mental health is important and you are entitled to care and support. Whether through formal mental health care, peer groups or community programmes, there are multiple ways to seek help. If young people understand that long waiting lists and social pressure are systemic, and not their personal failure, they can better advocate for the support and space they need.

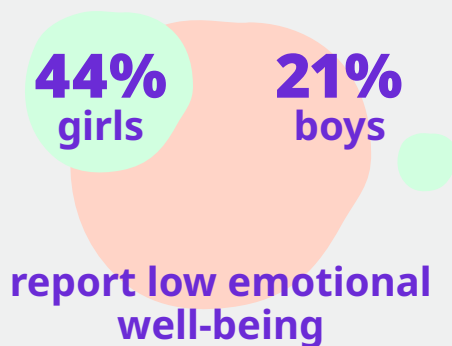
MENTAL HEALTH CONTEXT IN THE NETHERLANDS



KEY TRENDS

Figures from the Netherlands Youth Institute show that young people's well-being has clearly deteriorated in recent years, especially among girls. Although Dutch young people generally rate their lives highly, their perceived life satisfaction has not been this low since 2001.

In secondary education (12-18 years):



Psychosomatic complaints rose (from 2017 to 2021)

56% → **70%**
girls

42% → **54%**
boys

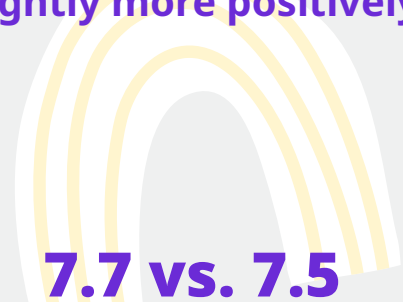
The same downward pattern is visible among young adults (18-25 years):

lowest happiness level among all over-18s



from 1997 to 2021

Young people from non-Western backgrounds rate their lives slightly more positively



but experience less social support and more social stress

RIVM research also shows that mental health problems among young people have increased:

The number of young people with suicidal thoughts rose from

8% ↑ 15%

from 2021 to 2025

Young adults (aged 16–25) describe their mental health as

(very) good

51%

moderate

35%

poor

14%



Stress is increasing on all fronts.
More than 2 in 5



young adults often feel stressed.

Certain groups are at extra risk:



young people who struggle to make ends meet, those who live alone, and 21- to 25-year-olds.

PRESSURE ON SOCIETY AND CONSEQUENCES FOR MENTAL HEALTH

The government emphasises social factors that contribute to mental health problems:

- ➔ Strong emphasis on performance and self-reliance.
- ➔ Decline in social cohesion.
- ➔ Pressure on the labour market, staff shortages in care and support.
- ➔ Constant exposure to social media and a feeling that life must be 'perfect'.

Good mental health has also been shown to be associated with a 15–20 year longer life expectancy.



ACCESSIBILITY OF CARE

Access to care is under severe pressure due to long waiting times and stigmatisation within mental health care. Young people experience many barriers on the route to care.

→ According to the Dutch Healthcare Authority (2025), approximately **100,000 people** are waiting for mental healthcare, **62,598** of whom have been waiting longer than the maximum standard of **14 weeks**. The average waiting time in specialised mental health care is between **15 and 28 weeks**. Many of those waiting have serious and complex problems (including trauma and eating disorders).

→ In the past two years, **54%** of clients have experienced stigmatisation by mental health care providers, mainly due to distant behaviour (**22%**) and language use (**20%**). In addition, **40%** of professionals indicated that stigmatisation occurs regularly within their team.

→ Only **35%** of young adults with serious emotional or behavioural problems sought professional help in the past year.

→ Young people only seek help when problems escalate, due to negative attitudes and a lack of knowledge about mental health problems, treatments and costs.

→ Factors associated with less help-seeking behaviour: male gender, younger age, higher level of education, living alone, paid work.



- Important barriers: not knowing where to go, waiting lists, diagnostic processes, financial barriers, denial or underestimation of problems, pessimism about the usefulness of help, insufficient knowledge about mental health problems and treatment options.
- Even within the healthcare system, not everyone reports receiving appropriate support; premature discontinuation of treatment occurs.

EFFECTIVENESS OF CAMPAIGNS AND THE NEED FOR A SYSTEMIC APPROACH

A study published in The Lancet Regional Health Europe found no effect of a national mental health campaign on mental resilience or reported mental health. The authors emphasise the need for a multilevel systemic approach to structurally improve mental health.

- Improvement suggestions from young people themselves: More awareness and information, clear updates on waiting lists and alternatives, informal drop-in locations, chat/telephone options, a limited number of different practitioners, and personalised care.



ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Youth Leadership Programme is funded by **Rare Impact Fund** to amplify the voice of young people within Mental Health Europe and beyond, fostering a movement of young leaders who drive cultural and social change. By transforming the narrative around mental health, young leaders will challenge stigma and advocate for tangible support in schools, care settings, and the wider community.

Active participation of young people in policy development and sociopolitical processes is essential for building a just and equitable society where everyone's mental health can thrive. For 2025–2026, the project will focus on implementing various engagement activities led by youth leaders at both European and local levels, with the goal of supporting the mental health of children and young people aged 12–25.

This infosheet is part of the Youth Leadership Programme and focuses specifically on the Netherlands. It aims to map youth-friendly, low-barrier (peer and community) mental health support offers, helping young people find services that feel accessible, non-judgemental, and easy to reach - especially during moments when life feels overwhelming or too difficult to manage alone. In addition, the information sheet provides an overview of the current situation in the Netherlands and the main challenges related to mental health in youth.



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