

Mental Health in All Policies – A fundamental platform for sustainability and growth for people, communities and economies

Mental health¹ is a necessary prerequisite for European societies to flourish. The social and economic sustainability of European societies requires effective promotion of mental health and prevention of mental ill-health.² This is especially compelling within the context of the current economic crisis given that inequalities between and within the Member States have grown and are likely to have an impact on people's mental health.

Mental Health in All Policies (MHiAP) is an approach to public policies across sectors that systematically takes into account the health implications of decisions, seeks synergies, and avoids harmful impacts on mental health in order to improve health and equity. Communities, civil society, and academia form a significant resource for developing, implementing and monitoring MHiAP. The private sector can offer valuable partnerships in bringing forward this approach.

Social, economic, and physical environments have a great impact on mental health. Thus, mental health is promoted most effectively by efforts of different policy sectors at all levels of decision making. Due to the differences between countries, there is no single model to follow. Usually the health sector needs to take the key role. The following activities are likely to be useful across different settings: creating regular platforms for dialogue with other sectors and stakeholders, framing action on established needs and priorities for MHiAP, supporting other sectors in assessing the mental health impact of their policy actions and modifying them accordingly, and building knowledge by providing evidence of success and lessons learnt.

Mental health can be promoted by strengthening protective factors and reducing risk factors throughout an individual's life. The foundations of mental health are laid down during pregnancy and the first years of life. Sectors outside the health sector have a fundamental capacity to influence mental health outcomes – for example, the social sector in ensuring affordable and high-quality day-care centres for children, the educational sector in promoting socio-emotional learning and wellbeing and in preventing mental stress, bullying, depression, and suicide; the employment sector in developing good management and efficient return-to-work practices; the housing and urban planning sector in providing good quality and reasonably priced housing and access to public parks and play areas, and many sectors in offering people in later life opportunities for continuing and discovering meaningful life styles, including participation in their communities.

Many important determinants of mental health are structural, such as poverty, gender inequality, and discrimination arising from stigma and prejudice, which can lead to social exclusion or being shut out from employment. Thus, the MHiAP approach should also champion policy interventions addressing structural determinants that operate within and increasingly across all countries. These interventions will produce downstream beneficial effects on people's mental health.

Data collection and reporting need to be developed to make it possible to monitor people's mental health, including positive mental health indicators, and to assess the impact of decisions in all policy sectors on mental health. Tools for mental health impact assessment and for involvement of the civic society need to be available and applied systematically at different levels of governance.

For further information on good practices and sector-specific policy recommendations on MHiAP, please see www.mentalhealthandwellbeing.eu/mental-health-in-all-policies.

¹ Mental health is a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their communities (WHO, 2013).

² The Member States have committed themselves to the European Pact for Mental Health and Well-being since 2008. They adopted in 2013 the resolution of the Regional Committee of the WHO Regional Office for Europe endorsing the European Mental Health Action Plan.