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## Expert Panel on effective ways of investing in health Hearing on ‘supporting mental health of health workforce and other essential workers’

Brussels, 8 June 2021 (virtual meeting)

### Aim and objectives

The Expert Panel on effective ways of investing in health (EXPH) is an interdisciplinary and independent group established by the European Commission in 2012 to provide non-binding independent advice on matters related to effective, accessible and resilient health systems in the form of opinions.

The aim of this hearing was to provide stakeholders with an opportunity to share their views on the draft opinion of the Expert Panel on ‘**Supporting mental health of health workforce and other essential workers**’. The draft opinion was made available on the Expert Panel’s website prior to the hearing.

### Panel members - speakers

Prof. Pedro Pita Barros (Chair of the hearing), Dr Heather-Lynn Rogers, Dr Jelka Zaletel (Rapporteurs)

In total around 100 participants attended the hearing.

### Presentation of the draft Opinion

The Chair and the Rapporteurs presented the main elements of the opinion (1) overview of mental health and conceptual framework, (2) specific factors influencing mental health of the health workforce and of other essential workers, (3) what interventions could be effective in addressing mental health support needs, (4) how to assess the cost of mental health problems in the health workforce and the cost-effectiveness of mental health interventions, (5) what are the conditions for the delivery of these interventions in a cost-effective, affordable and inclusive manner, and (6) how can the EU address these concerns.

The opinion concludes with the Panel's recommendations, including:

- focus on mental wellbeing,
- treat mental wellbeing as an inherent part of the organisation,
- create a supportive institutional framework at EU-level,
- create an appropriate cost-effectiveness framework,
- build and share knowledge on interventions, further developing current initiatives,
- have a common vision for mental health care,
- prepare organisations and their leaders,

- provide timely and adequate access to care.

These recommendations are supported by specific action points.

### Open discussion: participants' views

Participants in the discussion:

- Stressed that the emphasis should not be on the individuals to take control/responsibility for their mental health but on the system/employer/government.
- Highlighted the influence of solidarity and culture at social and organisational levels.
- Pointed out that mental health literacy for organisations also needs to include understanding of the economic costs on mental ill-health including absenteeism.
- Emphasised the importance of prevention and preparedness and the role of education in recognising mental health issues of health workers and destigmatising them.
- Agreed with the suggestion for creating a supportive institutional framework at EU level.
- Drew attention to the importance of leadership, and asked what tools would be useful at organisational level to help leadership to promote mental health and well-being.
- Debated the concept of 'essential workers', how wide or narrow that concept might best be applied, and how that then could find its way to recommendations that are of relevance to this group of workers.
- Asked about the Panel's perspective on gender differences in the approach to supporting mental health of healthcare and essential workers (and all workers in general).
- Asked how this opinion would feed into upcoming planned EU initiatives (e.g. the upcoming new EU Occupational Health and Safety Framework)

In a live poll conducted during the hearing, 45% of respondents said they represented NGO/Associations, 27% academia/think tanks, 14% government/public authority, 14% health service providers. In a poll asking participants to rank the Panel's recommendations in order of importance, the recommendation to create a supportive institutional framework at EU level was ranked as No.1, followed by the recommendations to treat mental wellbeing as an inherent part of the organisation and to shift the focus from mental health to mental wellbeing in policies.

### Next steps

Participants were invited to send any additional comments by 16 June 2021 via email to [SANTE-EXPERT-PANEL@ec.europa.eu](mailto:SANTE-EXPERT-PANEL@ec.europa.eu).

The Panel will finalise its work on this opinion in the next months.