



Flagship #18: Tackling stigma and discrimination

EU Support Package on tackling stigma and discrimination

Spotlight section on the EU

This spotlight section on the EU is part of the EU Support Package on stigma around mental health, which was presented on 10 October 2024, World Mental Health Day. It has been included in the World Health Organization's Toolkit to reduce stigma and discrimination on mental health.

Background

Mental health problems were estimated to affect about one in every six citizens in the EU¹ (84 million people) already before the COVID-19 pandemic. The prevalence of symptoms of depression during the pandemic doubled compared to pre-pandemic levels, as shown by national estimates for several EU countries. Vulnerable groups of the population, such as young people and those suffering from chronic conditions, were the most affected². The 2023 Country Health Profiles, prepared in the context of the State of Health in the EU cycle, included a spotlight on mental health³. One of the key messages highlighted in the Synthesis Report is that breaking stigma and discrimination surrounding mental health is key amongst other actions, such as stepping up investment in mental health systems reforms.

Policies and actions at EU level

The Commission is committed to supporting EU Member States in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular target 3.4: "by 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being". The strategic framework for this support is the 'Healthier Together' EU non-communicable diseases initiative⁴ which includes a focus on mental health. The 'Healthier Together' guidance document is a toolkit for action by Member States and stakeholders to address mental health and other key public health challenges. The Commission Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health⁵, provides a strategic framework for actions to promote good mental health and to address mental health issues and related stigma, in a comprehensive manner. The Communication on the European Health Union of May 2024 also

¹ https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-02/2018_healthatglance_rep_en_0.pdf

² <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15971-2023-INIT/en/pdf>

³ https://health.ec.europa.eu/document/download/66d6601b-8a37-4d44-ae2b-3ba2f8f34f41_en?filename=state_2023_synthesis-report_en.pdf

⁴ [EU Non-communicable diseases \(NCDs\) initiative: Guidance document - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/health/eu_ncd_initiative/)

⁵ [Commission Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health](https://ec.europa.eu/health/eu_ncd_initiative/)

highlighted the Commission's on-going efforts to prioritise the promotion and protection of mental health in Europe, in particular of the most vulnerable groups in our societies.

Financial support from various EU funding instruments, including the EU4Health programme, Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe, is given to Member States and stakeholders for actions and projects on mental health. These include collaborative actions ('joint actions') between national authorities and projects implemented by civil society organisations and other relevant stakeholders. The European Health and Digital Executive Agency manages the implementation of these actions and projects⁶.

A comprehensive approach to mental health

On 7 June 2023, the Commission adopted the Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health. It promotes a holistic, prevention-oriented and multi-stakeholder approach to mental health. With 20 flagship initiatives and EUR 1.23 billion in funding opportunities provided by several EU funding instruments, the Communication is a strategic framework to support Member States and stakeholders in taking a comprehensive approach into integrating mental health across all policies. This Communication builds on the efforts of the Commission to improve mental health over the past 25 years, such as the EU Compass for Action on Mental Health and Well-being⁷, which included the promotion of social inclusion and combating stigma as one of its priority areas.

In order to monitor the implementation of the Communication on comprehensive approach to mental health and its 20 flagships, the Commission has developed a Tracking Framework⁸, which will be regularly updated to provide the latest state of play.

Flagship initiative on tackling stigma

One of the 20 flagship initiatives of the Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health addresses stigma surrounding mental health⁹. The Commission will allocate EUR 18 million to:

- improve the quality of life of patients, their families and (in)formal carers, including cancer patients, with a particular focus on addressing stigma and discrimination by supporting Member States to identify and implement best practices (EU repository for best and promising practices on mental health);
- support stakeholders to implement projects, such as awareness-raising activities to break through stigma and address discrimination, ensure social inclusion, protect the rights of patients, focusing on vulnerable groups¹⁰;
- develop EU guidance on breaking through stigma and tackling discrimination with the Member States under the Expert Group on Public Health and stakeholder groups;
- introduce communication activities to promote awareness in the fight against stigma (#InTHisTogether campaign).

⁶ [EU4Health - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/europa/en/eu4health)

⁷ [EU-Compass for Action on Mental Health and Well-being - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/europa/en/eu-compass-for-action-on-mental-health-and-well-being)

⁸ https://health.ec.europa.eu/latest-updates/tracking-framework-implementation-commission-communication-comprehensive-approach-mental-health-2024-05-13_en

⁹ Flagship number 18 'Tackling Stigma and Discrimination'

¹⁰ For example: [tAckLing menTAl Health cancer patients and their families: digital solutions for bETter cAre](#); [Well U](#); [MentBox](#); [Mesur](#); [Improving access to mental health for Roma People](#).

To implement this flagship, the Commission had set up a drafting group on stigma¹¹ under the Expert Group on Public Health (PHEG)¹². The drafting group is composed of national experts, had met three times and agreed to develop an EU support package to address stigma surrounding mental health. The package will include best and promising practices on stigma and an awareness raising campaign.

The Commission's #InThisTogether campaign seeks to raise awareness of the importance and benefits of tackling stigma around mental health and to increase understanding about the role we can all play. It will confront misconceptions and myths around mental health and provide reliable sources of information and support. The campaign will have a special focus on anxiety and depression, as these conditions are particularly prevalent among teenagers and young adults, the campaign's main target audience.

#InThisTogether will feature testimonials, teaching materials, sharable social media content, webinars, collaborations with influencers and content creators, all available on a central campaign hub. The campaign will run from October 2024 until early 2025 in all EU languages, with paid promotion in Greece, Ireland, Poland, Romania, Spain and Sweden.

EU funded actions

The Commission provides financial support through the EU4Health programme, Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe to Member States and stakeholders to develop and implement actions that address stigma and promote social inclusion.

- The joint actions, PreventNCD¹³ (EUR 76 million) and MENTOR¹⁴ (EUR 6 million) address stigma among their activities.
- Stakeholder-led projects such as Let's talk about Children¹⁵ that supports families in vulnerable situation through the provision of multidisciplinary interventions and training of health professionals and social workers. The Icehearts¹⁶ project implements a model that provides long-term and holistic support for vulnerable children by engaging children through sports with social work. The project MENTALITY¹⁷, includes activities that address stigma and discrimination as a major barrier to mental health support.
- Other projects funded under the EU research programmes include the MENTUPP¹⁸, which focuses on promoting mental health in Small and Medium Enterprises operating in the construction, health and ICT sectors, and the EMPOWER¹⁹ project, which aims to diminish stigma within the workplace.

Best and promising practices to tackle stigma

National initiatives have been collected through the EU Best Practices Portal²⁰, that includes an EU repository for best and promising practices on mental health submitted by Member States and

¹¹ [Drafting Group on stigma and discrimination on mental health, under Public Health Expert Group](#)

¹² https://health.ec.europa.eu/non-communicable-diseases/expert-group-public-health_en

¹³ <https://www.preventnkd.eu/>

¹⁴ [Mental Health Together](#)

¹⁵ <https://letstalk.utu.fi/blog/portugal-child-protection-system/>

¹⁶ <https://www.icehearts.eu/>

¹⁷ [MENTALITY European Project \(mentalhealthurope.org\)](#)

¹⁸ <https://www.mentuppproject.eu/>

¹⁹ <https://empower-project.eu/project/>

²⁰ <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/dyna/bp-portal/>

stakeholders. The following best and promising practices address stigma surrounding mental health:

Act Belong Commit (Denmark): this best practice aims to improve mental health in the Danish population by creating mentally healthy and inclusive sports communities. In this context, decreasing stigma on mental health represents a founding pillar upon which the programme is built.

Living and Learning Together. Awareness, Prevention and Resilience Building in School (Greece): this best practice aims to strengthen the mental health resilience of learners and young people in school communities through a multidisciplinary approach that includes raising awareness, promoting human rights, and eliminating stigma.

H-work project (Italy): this project, identified as a best practice, aims to improve mental well-being in the workplace by evaluating psychosocial risks and implementing targeted interventions that address stigma related to mental health.

Beyond Barriers (France): this promising practice promotes the introduction of innovative roles in the provision of mental health services, with the aim of improving empowerment through reduced stigma and enhanced quality of care.

Fighting Stigma at Work: One of Us (Denmark): this best practice focuses its activities on anti-stigma efforts that facilitate identification, empathy and reflection through, for example challenging myths with facts, social contact activities where target groups can meet people with lived experience of mental health problems and dialogues at schools, workplaces and other settings.