



European
Commission

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HIGH LEVEL CONFERENCE ON AN EU COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH ON MENTAL HEALTH

WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY CONFERENCE 2023, FLASH REPORT

On the occasion of World Mental Health Day on 10 October, Stella Kyriakides, European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, hosted a high-level conference on mental health in Brussels. The event, moderated by Belle de Jong, brought together hundreds of participants and speakers representing EU policymakers, national governments, European organisations and patient advocates. The speakers set the scene for discussions which took place in the conference venue, as well as online.

Her Majesty the Queen of the Belgians, a dedicated advocate for global mental health highlighted the recent challenges faced by Europe, including the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, and climate change.

Stella Kyriakides extended her thoughts to the people of Ukraine and all those enduring mental health challenges due to conflict. She declared that the an EU-wide approach to mental health will be vital in building a strong and people-focused European Health Union.

Marc Angel, Vice-President of the European Parliament, stressed the importance of complementing mental health actions with social and equality policies to effectively address present issues and prevent future challenges.

Dr Hans Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe, stated that mental health is a fundamental human right. He highlighted the alarming decrease in the mental health workforce and the mere 3.6% allocation of the total health budget spent on mental health. **Olena Zelenska**, the First Lady of Ukraine, said Russia's war against Ukraine extends beyond Ukraine's borders, with nearly 40% of citizens feeling its psychological effects in the US and in the EU. She stressed the urgent need for psychological support in Ukraine and highlighted efforts within the Ukrainian mental health programme to develop support systems, share expertise, and foster resilience and growth in the face of trauma.

José Miñones, Spain's Minister of Health, reaffirmed Spain's commitment to prioritising mental health discussions during their EU Presidency in the second half of 2023. He announced an upcoming high-level meeting in Asturias, Spain, on 14 November, on mental health.

Frank Vanderbroucke, Belgium's Minister of Social Affairs, said Belgium has started reforming its mental healthcare system by investing in an innovative approach that focuses on improving access for vulnerable populations.

Judit Bidló, Hungary's Deputy State Secretary for Health, explained the country's mental health strategy, which focuses on promotion, literacy, and community-based programmes.

Bertrand Bainvel, UNICEF representative to the European Institutions, discussed the important role of global partnerships in tackling mental health challenges in children.

Rozina Spinnoy, founder of BIDS Belgium and member of Mental Health Europe, shared her personal journey, and underscored the importance of empathy, care and human rights-based policies to ensure a dignified life for all.

Dr Lydia Abela, First Lady of Malta and President of the Special Olympics Malta, noted the crucial contribution by Special Olympics Malta, which uses sports as a tool to prevent mental health issues in people with intellectual disabilities.

Gilmour Borg, athlete leader, shared his personal experience as a victim of bullying due to his intellectual disability and he praised the Special Olympics for providing safe spaces and fostering trust.

Nicola Unterecker, Patient advocate from Youth Cancer Europe, delved into the mental health challenges faced by cancer patients, who continue to grapple with the post-treatment consequences of the disease.