

Flash Report

Member States Workshop on the EU Non-Communicable Diseases Initiative

8 December 2022

DG SANTE hosted an online workshop for with over 55 Member States' representatives of the Non-Communicable Diseases Subgroup of the Steering Group on Health Promotion, Disease Prevention and Management of Non-Communicable Diseases, chaired by the Acting Deputy Director General for Health.

The objectives of the meeting were to provide an update on the 'Healthier together' - EU NCD initiative, and also inform Member States on the planned activities of the World Health Organization/Europe (WHO/Europe) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to provide tailor-made support to each country in the area of mental health. Member States were also invited to highlight the priorities in mental health and to indicate their needs, gaps and obstacles.

The Chair also informed Member States of the adoption of a Commission Decision establishing a new expert group on public health. This expert group will advise the Commission on policy development and transfer of best practices related to major public health challenges, including both non-communicable disease (such as mental health, cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases) as well as communicable diseases (such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and hepatitis, vaccination and antimicrobial resistance).¹ The procedure for nominating members of the new public health expert group and for the subgroup on mental health would be circulated shortly. The rules of procedure and the work plan for the new group would also be prepared early in 2023.

Update on the 'Healthier Together' - EU NCD Initiative

DG SANTE presented an update on the implementation of the five target strands of the 'Healthier Together' - initiative² with a particular emphasis on mental health. The current and future work in this particular area was highlighted with a wide range of initiatives targeting different aspects of mental health across Member States. The Commission also highlighted that there are actions for both Member States and stakeholders so that the work is aligned and supportive.

Mental health

The Chair then informed on Commission's plans on preparing the mental health initiative which President von der Leyen called for her in her recent State of the European Union speech". This new initiative also reflects the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe, which ended in May 2022.

The Commission has started to prepare this work, which will involve all relevant EU policies, funding and actions from the different Commission departments, under the

¹ https://health.ec.europa.eu/latest-updates/commission-expert-group-public-health-2022-12-08_en

² https://health.ec.europa.eu/non-communicable-diseases/healthier-together-eu-non-communicable-diseases-initiative_en

coordination of Secretariat-General. The Chair also stressed that the initiative will be prepared in close collaboration with the Member States and stakeholders.

The **World Health Organisation/Europe** presented the activities of WHO in the area of mental health as part of the European Framework for Action on Mental Health 2021-2025.³ It highlighted the areas where they plan to provide tailor-made support to each individual Member State in capacity building for mental health programmes. It emphasised collaboration with the EU and OECD in providing such targeted support to effectively address their specific needs, gaps and obstacles in the field of mental health.

The **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)** highlighted the work being done to support transfer of best practices in mental health which complements activities by WHO/Europe and the Commission. OECD's future efforts will focus on two main areas: firstly, supporting the economic rationale for the mental health strand of the 'Healthier Together' - Initiative, and secondly, analysis of candidate best practices⁴ and promising practices for NCDs, including mental health.

Discussion

The Member States supported the development of a comprehensive approach on mental health, as expressed by Commission President von der Leyen in her State of the European Union. Some examples already exist at national level and were briefly presented. Several Member States encouraged a mental-health in-all-policies approach and the need to focus the work on children, young people and other vulnerable populations, migrants, and homeless people. The Member States said that they would be keen to participate in the proposed new mental health subgroup under the new expert group on public health. Many also expressed willingness to participate in a survey or be carried out by the WHO to identify the specific national needs, gaps and obstacles. The need to include drug and alcohol dependency as part of mental health actions was stressed by several participants. Several Member States outlined their own national plans and programmes on mental health in their populations. The importance of delivering effective community-based mental health policies was noted by several participants as was the need to reduce stigma and discrimination associated with mental health issues.

Next steps

The Chair thanked all participants for their valuable input and for an interesting debate and exchange on mental health. It was decided that a subgroup on mental health will be set up under the new expert group on public health and that the survey will be launched by the WHO to map the national needs on mental health.

³ <https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/9789289057813>

⁴ <https://www.oecd.org/health/best-practice-in-public-health.htm>