

## Flash Report

### Second meeting of the PHEG sub-group on mental health

28 March 2023

The second meeting of the sub-group on mental health under the aegis of the new Public Health Expert Group (PHEG)<sup>1</sup> was held online on 28 March 2023. It was chaired by DG SANTE and attended by the representatives of 23 Member States and Norway together with Commission services and agencies (AGRI, CNECT, EAC, ECHO, EMPL, ENV, JUST, REFORM, RTD, SG, JRC and HaDEA) and the World Health Organisation (WHO), and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

The objective was to inform Member States on the state of play of the Commission's mental health initiative, including some initial results from the WHO survey on mental health capacity building needs and results of the call for evidence and stakeholder consultations conducted to date. Member States were invited to provide feedback and share national priorities and challenges in the field of mental health, focusing on issues of promotion and prevention, access to care and early detection.

#### Update of WHO survey on mental health capacity-building needs

The WHO presented the initial results of the survey – developed in cooperation with DG SANTE and OECD – to map the capacity of national mental health systems in EU Member States, Norway and Iceland. The initial results showed the key challenges and enablers in policies and health systems for improved mental health prevention and management. Most countries have national mental health policies in place, including internal indicators and objectives for monitoring. Priorities identified in the survey included community-based care, breaking stigma measures, promotion and prevention, suicide prevention and mental health for children and adolescents. The need for greater support and capacity building for mental health workers was also highlighted.

#### Results of the call for evidence and stakeholder consultations

DG SANTE gave an update of the ongoing consultations with Member States, stakeholders, citizens and other Commission services in preparing the Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health. The call for evidence led to 313 responses, including reflections on key areas for action as well as suggestions for possible solutions. The preliminary analysis of the input so far indicates that using a multi-disciplinary approach and focusing on vulnerable groups were areas of key concern. A stakeholder webinar held in early March reiterated many of the same challenges in mental health raised in the call for evidence, including the importance of having a focus on children and minority groups and co-creating the initiative with persons that suffer from mental health problems, including young persons.

#### Discussion – tour de table

Member States broadly welcomed the progress accomplished to date and expressed their support for the forthcoming Commission Communication on mental health, which would complement national programmes and support capacity building measures. They also welcomed the WHO survey. Countries identified their key challenges and priorities, including increased levels of suicide and depression; improved access to mental health services and treatment; actions to tackle psychosocial risks at work; a need to focus on minority and disadvantaged groups, with emphasis on children and young people; the importance of awareness-raising campaigns and fighting stigmatisation and discrimination; the need for more effective screening and referral programmes; the shift towards community care; the lack of qualified staff and the need for specialised training. Member States also emphasised the importance of an integrated mental health in all policies

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<sup>1</sup> [https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-12/c\\_2022\\_8816\\_en.pdf](https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-12/c_2022_8816_en.pdf)

approach and fostering cross-silo and cross-country cooperation; connecting experts for exchange and support; identifying cost-efficient interventions; exploring schools and workplaces as intervention settings; linking mental health with health determinants in an holistic approach.

#### Next steps

The Chair thanked all participants for their input and said that it would provide a valuable basis for the subsequent work of the sub-group. **The deadline for WHO survey and possible written contributions for the mental health initiative was extended to 4 April.** A call for promising and best practices focusing on mental health is planned to be launched in May 2023. The next meeting of the sub-group on mental health is planned for October 2023 will include an update on several mental health actions being funded under the 2023 EU4Health work programme.