

Flash Report

First meeting of the PHEG sub-group on mental health

14 February 2023

The sub-group on mental health under the aegis of the new Public Health Expert Group (PHEG)¹ held a first virtual meeting on 14 February 2023. It was chaired by DG SANTE and attended by the representatives of 23 EU Member States and Norway, together with Commission services (SG, EMPL, EAC, CNECT, REFORM, JRC, JUST, HOME) 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 mandate for the new sub-group on mental health, provide an update on the ongoing work on a comprehensive approach to mental health, and present the draft WHO survey on mental health capacity building needs. Member States were invited to provide feedback and share national priorities and challenges in the field of mental health.

Mandate for the sub-group on mental health

DG SANTE presented the revised rules of procedure and the mandate for the sub-group as adopted by the PHEG meeting in early February.² The sub-group was set up to advise the Commission on actions related to a “comprehensive approach to mental health” and to contribute to EU actions to address mental health-related issues. The sub-group is tasked with identifying national needs and potential actions related to the promotion of good mental health and the prevention of mental health problems. The sub-group will also advise on the transfer of best or promising practices and provide recommendations to the Commission on effective ways to support Member States.

State of play of the Commission Communication on mental health

The sub-group’s work will support the development of the Commission Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health, to be adopted in June 2023. DG SANTE gave an update of the ongoing preparations and consultations with Member States, stakeholders, citizens and other Commission services. A new approach to mental health, as announced in the 2022 State of the Union speech by President von der Leyen³ and included in the 2023 Commission work programme, will promote a comprehensive, prevention-oriented approach to mental health and address all policies and socioeconomic and environmental determinants that affect mental health.

WHO survey on mental health capacity-building needs

The World Health Organization presented the main areas of the survey – developed in cooperation with DG SANTE and OECD - to map the capacity of national mental health systems. The results of this survey will help to identify the needs, priorities and obstacles in the Member States and will allow for a tailored support to each individual Member State.

Discussion – tour de table

Member States broadly welcomed and expressed their support for the forthcoming Commission Communication on mental health and the WHO survey. Both were seen as important and timely initiatives that recognise and support the growing need for action on mental health.

They referred to the **increasing challenges** at national level (such as increased levels of suicide and depression; need to focus on older people as well as children and young people; need for more

¹ https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-12/c_2022_8816_en.pdf

² https://health.ec.europa.eu/events/public-health-expert-group-2023-02-03_en

³ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_22_5493

ambitious actions on promotion and prevention; shift towards community care; the lack of qualified staff and the need for training; stigmatisation and discrimination; funding for mental health services). The Member States considered the promotion of mental health and prevention of mental health problems to be the most urgent challenges to address, followed by support and improving access to treatment and care of mental health problems.

The Member States underlined the agenda-setting role of the Commission and the importance of developing **recommendations** and **transferring knowledge and best practices**, especially on **promotion and prevention**, and on **access** to mental health services. They emphasised the importance of cross-country cooperation to promote action at national level, and of connecting experts for exchange and support. They identified the need for **capacity-building** as well as in the **early detection and screening** of mental health problems. Support in initiating and taking forward **mental health reforms** was requested by the majority of the Member States.

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 next meeting of the sub-group on mental health will take place on 28 March 2023.