
Mental Health

EuroNet MRPB Policy Document

Policy Small Working Group

Rachel Barbabela (co-coordinator), *Local Health Unit Matosinhos, Portugal*

Mustafa Develi (co-coordinator), *Suleyman Demirel University Faculty of Medicine, HASUDER, Türkiye*

Marta Caminiti, *University of Perugia, Consulta degli Specializzandi SItI, Italy*

Abdelaziz Ibn Abdelouahab, *Hospital Clínic de Barcelona, ARES, Spain*

Paloma Altozano Rodulfo, *Hospital Clínic de Valencia, ARES, Spain*

Executive Summary

Mental health is a public health issue with socioeconomic implications that extend beyond individual well-being to impact society as well. It is tied to social determinants such as poverty, social exclusion, and unequal access to education and healthcare. Youth with mental health conditions face increased risks of stigma, discrimination, and social exclusion, which can compromise their educational and social development. Globally, over 1 billion people are affected by mental disorders, with adolescents disproportionately impacted and at risk of future challenges if untreated.

Mental health conditions contribute to high mortality rates and reduced life expectancy, with suicide being a leading cause of death among young adults. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated mental health issues, particularly among healthcare workers, evidencing the importance of workplace support. International organisations advocate for comprehensive approaches that incorporate mental health across all policies. Improving living and working conditions, expanding community-based mental health services, and addressing stigma and suicide prevention, especially for vulnerable groups such as youth and health professionals, are crucial strategies.

Additionally, promoting mental health in workplaces and schools, improving access to care for young people, and using a holistic approach in mental health care are key priorities. Enhancing EU-wide data collection, research, and monitoring is essential to support informed policymaking, share best practices, and deepen understanding of mental health impacts on young populations.

EuroNet MRPH, representing public health medical residents, emphasises the urgency of integrated mental health policies that includes education, employment, and housing. Internal actions include capacity-building events, expert-led discussions, peer support networks, and mental health awareness initiatives. Externally, EuroNet MRPH commits to advocacy with governments and organisations, partnerships with universities and NGOs, and collaborative research, particularly on youth and healthcare worker mental health. By prioritising mental health in public health agendas, we aim to promote sustainable mental health outcomes across Europe.

Introduction

Mental health is a significant public health issue impacting individuals, communities, and society as a whole. It goes beyond personal well-being, representing a profound public health challenge with wide-reaching socioeconomic implications (1). Mental health is closely linked to social determinants such as poverty, poor living conditions, social exclusion, and unequal access to education and healthcare, all of which contribute to the prevalence and persistence of mental health conditions (1). Addressing mental health, therefore, requires more than individual interventions—it demands a societal approach (1). Youth with mental health disorders often experience difficulties in a variety of settings including within their own families at home, in school, and in the community (2).

Globally, over 1 billion people are affected by mental disorders, with anxiety and depression accounting for more than 60% of cases (3). One in seven adolescents aged 10-19 experiences a mental disorder, contributing to 13% of the global disease burden in this age group (4). Depression, anxiety, and behavioural disorders are some of the primary causes of illness and disability among adolescents (5).

Adolescents with mental health conditions are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion, discrimination, stigma (affecting readiness to seek help), educational difficulties, risk-taking behaviours, physical ill-health and human rights violations (2).

While high-income countries report higher rates of mental disorders, 82% of cases occur in low- and middle-income countries (3). Mental health conditions not only impact individual well-being but also contribute to higher mortality rates, with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder reducing life expectancy by 10-20 years (4), and suicide claiming over 700,000 lives annually, making it a leading cause of death, especially among young adults, as suicide ranks as the third leading cause of death for individuals aged 15-29 (3).

The COVID-19 pandemic worsened this crisis, increasing rates of depression by 18% and anxiety by 15% (3). It also raised the occurrence of mental health disorders among healthcare workers, both during and after the pandemic. Hill et al. found that 46.2% of healthcare professionals showed depressive symptoms, and 45.9% exhibited anxiety symptoms (6). Studies during the pandemic on European public health residents showed that residents with clinically relevant depressive symptoms have a less favourable job-satisfaction profile compared to those without and that the female gender was a predictor for symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress (7). Mental distress among doctors during medical training is common (8,9), and studies have suggested that resident physicians experience higher rates of depression than the general public (10).

If adolescent mental health issues are left untreated, the effects can carry into adulthood, negatively impacting both physical and mental well-being and reducing the chances of living a fulfilling adult life (2). Economically, mental disorders are a major burden, contributing to 5.7% of global GDP in 2019, with these costs expected to rise due to productivity losses (11).

In Europe, mental health conditions have a significant impact, with a 14.5% increase in years of life lost (YLL) due to mental disorders between 1990 and 2019 (12).

Approximately 38.2% of the EU population, or 164.8 million people, experience a mental disorder each year, with anxiety, insomnia, major depression, and substance abuse being the most common (13). Poor mental health also affects social cohesion, economic productivity, and healthcare systems, as recognized by the European Union (EU) (14).

Various international bodies, including the United Nations (UN), World Health Organization (WHO), European Council, European Commission (EC), and World Bank, have called for action to address mental health (1). Future efforts must focus on leadership, governance, and cross-sectoral approaches that integrate mental health into all policies (1). Improving living and working conditions, providing comprehensive community-based mental health services, and addressing stigma and suicide prevention, particularly among vulnerable groups like youth and health professionals, are essential (1,15).

Promoting mental health in workplaces and educational settings, enhancing access to care for young people, and adopting a holistic approach to preventing and treating mental disorders are also key strategies (15). Furthermore, there is a pressing need to improve data collection, research, and monitoring systems within the EU to guide better policymaking, share best practices, and further investigate the impact of mental health on young populations (15).

EuroNet MRPH Position

Euronet MRPH, as public health residents, recognizes that mental health is a critical issue and must be properly addressed since it profoundly affects individuals, communities, and society. Mental health is closely related to social determinants such as poverty, unequal access to education and healthcare, and poor living conditions — factors that disproportionately impact vulnerable populations. It is important to recognise that mental health requires a societal approach, not just individual treatment, and must focus on the social conditions that contribute to the prevalence and maintenance of mental illness.

We call for stronger leadership and governance to prioritise mental health across all policies. Governments and institutions must implement cross-sectoral strategies that address mental health in education, employment, and housing. As a group of young health professionals, we recognize the urge for improvements in living and working conditions for vulnerable populations, such as minority groups; economically disadvantaged groups; chronically ill or groups living with disabilities; the elderly, children and mothers; immigrants; and rural residents. Besides, given the high rates of mental health disorders among health professionals, it is essential to establish robust workplace support systems to reduce burnout, address psychosocial risks, and promote well-being during medical training.

In addition, we acknowledge the necessity of increased efforts to combat mental health stigma and to develop strategies to prevent suicide on global, regional, national and local levels, especially for adolescents and young adults. In order to provide timely and equitable access to care, to move away from institutionalised models and to prioritise person-centred approaches, we need governments to shift towards integrated, community-based mental health services. EuroNet MRPH believes in the importance of involving people with lived experience of mental health disorders in the policy-making process and also valuing them as experts on the impact policies are likely to have or have had in the past. This would allow us to make policy that serves people's needs.

Mental health must be a priority across all sectors, and, since there is no health without mental health, we all ought to play our part in the public health agenda to address the mental well-being of every individual. We ask for investments in early intervention, evidence-based comprehensive care, and data-driven research that are fundamental to improving the lifelong outcomes for those affected by mental illness and preventing the crisis from deepening. Now is the time for decisive action to create a society where mental health is recognized, supported, and incorporated into all levels of public policies.

Call to Action

Mental health impacts not only on an individual level but also as an issue that can greatly impact society. Our position strengthens the necessity to include mental health in all policies and our call to action emphasises collaboration, advocacy, and capacity building both within the Euronet MRPH group and externally, aligning internal initiatives with broader efforts to improve mental health outcomes across Europe. It encourages a collective effort from health professionals, policymakers, and communities to create sustainable mental health solutions. Therefore, EuroNet MRPH commits to the following actions:

Internal Actions

1. Capacity building events on Mental Health

Organise regular events addressing key mental health topics such as stress management, resilience building, and burnout prevention. These sessions will provide public health residents and group members with practical tools for maintaining their own well-being while fostering knowledge on advocating for others. This internal capacity-building will ensure members can effectively support both themselves and their peers.

2. Expert-Led and Patient/Family Group Talks

Host talks led by mental health professionals, researchers, and patient/family representatives to explore current trends and interventions in mental health. These discussions should cover critical areas like youth mental health, healthcare workforce well-being, and emerging public health challenges in Europe. This knowledge exchange will foster a shared understanding and advocacy for improved mental health care.

3. Building a Supportive Network

We encourage the establishment of a confidential peer support network within the group to offer a safe space for members to discuss mental health concerns and challenges. This network could include mentorship programs and support circles that create an environment of mutual care, particularly during stressful periods like training or exams. Members will feel less isolated and more supported throughout their careers.

4. Mental Health Awareness Events

Organise events such as a “Run/Walk for Mental Health” during key meetings (e.g., the next spring gathering). These events not only promote mental health awareness but also encourage physical activity, which is known to benefit mental health. They offer a chance to engage with the broader community and highlight the importance of mental wellness.

5. Promote Mental Health-Related Projects

Showcase and support initiatives within the group that address mental health, whether through awareness campaigns, research, or community interventions. Projects focused on youth mental health or the mental well-being of healthcare professionals should be prioritised, ensuring the group’s efforts align with broader public health goals.

External Actions

1. Advocacy Efforts

Engage actively with institutions like EC, WHO, UN, national governments, academia, scientific societies and civil society organisations to call for:

- Stronger leadership and governance to prioritise mental health across all policies;
- Intensified efforts on global, regional, national and local level to combat mental health stigma and the development of suicide prevention strategies, especially for adolescents and young adults;
- Address the pressing need to shift towards integrated, community-based mental health services that provide timely and equitable access to care, moving away from institutionalised models and prioritising person-centred approaches;
- Investments in early intervention, evidence-based comprehensive care, public mental health services and infrastructures (particularly in under-resourced areas), and data-driven research to improve the long-term outcomes for those affected by mental illness and prevent the crisis from escalating further;
- Improvements in living and working conditions for vulnerable populations, such as minority groups, economically disadvantaged groups, chronically ill or groups living with disabilities, the elderly, children and mothers, immigrants, rural residents;
- Involvement of People with Lived Experience (PLE) of mental health disorders in shaping mental health policies;
- Government-led mental health literacy campaigns targeting diverse populations, including marginalised communities;
- Culturally sensitive mental health strategies that promote inclusivity across regions and populations;
- Empowered healthcare professionals shaping mental health policies and ensuring policies are translated into actionable, practical initiatives at the local level;
- Promotion of a healthy work environment during medical training to reduce burnout, address psychosocial risks, and promote well-being.

2. Collaborative Partnerships

Build and strengthen partnerships with universities, NGOs, mental health advocacy groups, and healthcare institutions. These collaborations can help share expertise, leverage resources, and amplify collective impact. For example, teamwork across medical fields—psychiatrists, clinical pharmacologists, general practitioners, and nurses—can help develop holistic care strategies for both youth and healthcare professionals; promoting physical activity with a cross-sectoral approach that includes physical activity professionals, urban planners and government; and provide social support for families increasing awareness regarding adequate parenting techniques and reducing childhood traumas, which impact individuals throughout their lives. Additionally, mobilise communities by leading mental health literacy campaigns aimed at reducing stigma, increasing awareness, and promoting early intervention in mental health care.

3. Collaborative Research and Documentation

Initiate or support joint research projects focused on key areas such as youth mental health trends, the mental health of healthcare workers, and effective community interventions. Publishing joint research reports will provide valuable data to inform policy-making at national and European levels. In addition, advocate for investments in telehealth and digital platforms that expand access to mental health services, especially for remote and underserved populations. Support the development of online mental health training courses that are accessible to both health professionals and the broader community, expanding the reach of mental health education.

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