



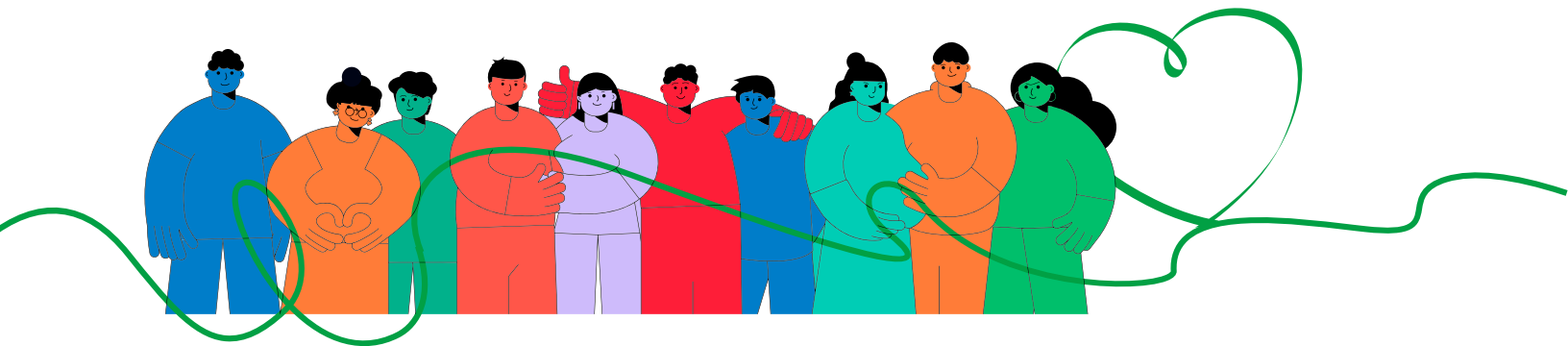
EUROPEAN
MENTAL
HEALTH
WEEK

22-28
MAY 2023

Mental Health Europe's Policy Recommendations



Towards
Mentally Healthy Communities
Enabling Everybody to Thrive



Towards mentally healthy communities enabling everybody to thrive

Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to realise their own potential, live in line with their values, and meaningfully contribute to their communities. Mental health is an integral part of health and a basic human right. Good mental health is also crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development.

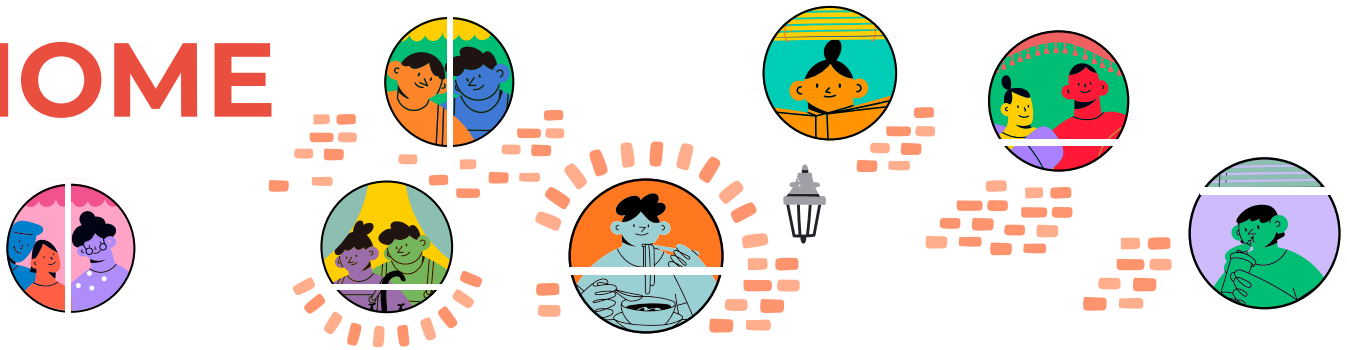
Communities have a substantial role in people's mental health. They can provide people with a sense of belonging, act as a powerful source of support, offer a feeling of purpose, and enable societal changes that are needed to achieve good mental well-being.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on mental health, with the result of widespread awareness and an increased value given to mental health by individuals, communities and governments. It is now time to match this value with commitment, engagement and investment by all stakeholders, across all sectors. Key priorities of action for European countries consist in **reshaping the environments that influence mental health** (such as home, education, workplaces and broader communities) and in enabling a **community-based network of formal and informal support**.

It is crucial to provide everyone in society with a comprehensive understanding of the social, cultural and relational factors that impact mental health. While it might be easier to act on individual skills, this is not enough to achieve good mental health for all. Structural changes must be put in place to enhance protective factors and mitigate risk factors related to the broader socio-economic and environmental determinants of mental health.

A widespread understanding of mental health and the factors that shape it can serve as basis to demand policies and actions that can bring about the right changes. This approach is key to ensure that everybody lives in a context that supports their mental health and enables them to flourish at every stage of life.

HOME



Home is a crucial setting for mental health. Nurturing care for early childhood development is a protective factor, particularly important as the foundations for good mental health are laid early in life. Caring responsibilities (for children and people with long-term care needs) can have a negative impact on the mental health of caregivers, in the absence of adequate support. Other risk factors in home settings include loneliness and isolation, intimate partner violence, abuse and neglect of children and older people, as well as household hardship.

Recommendations to European countries

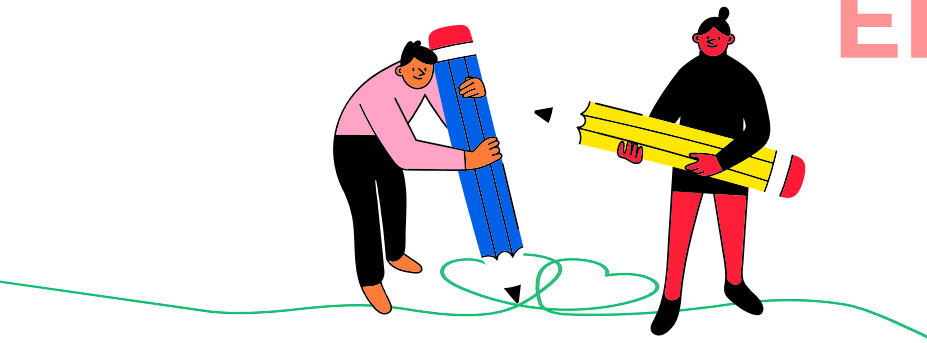
Structural Changes

- » Implement caregiving friendly policies that provide caregivers with the time and resources they need to implement their role in a way that supports the mental wellbeing of those they care for and thrive. For instance, generous parental leave can mitigate and prevent mental health problems among parents, with snowball effect on children's wellbeing.
- » Reduce social isolation and loneliness by improving infrastructure (e.g., transport, digital inclusion), by funding innovative approaches which creates cultures of belonging and build stronger social connections, as well as through laws and policies, (addressing, for instance, ageism, inequality and the digital divide). Legislation should expand its reach to people of all ages, not forgetting youth, and invest in intergenerational connection.
- » Provide social protection schemes for households in vulnerable situations, debt recovery and financial hardship support.
- » Ensure access to safe, affordable, long-term and quality housing, as a major protective factor for people's mental health.
- » Intervene with evidence-based methods to minimize the consequences of stressful and traumatic events in childhood and in families.
- » Strengthen prevention and response mechanism to domestic violence and abuse.

Skills

- » Ensure provision of interventions to support caregivers (in childcare and long-term care) in their role, specifically their caregiving and mental health knowledge, attitudes, skills and practices.

EDUCATION



Schools, universities and learning environments provide the opportunity to reach large numbers of children, adolescents, and young adults from many backgrounds. Unfortunately, not everyone might have access to mental health support or even to mental health promotion and prevention programmes. Effective integration of mental health in formal and informal educational settings can increase learners' mental health literacy and improve their mental health while decreasing stigma, but also increase learning and educational outcomes and reduce drops-out.

Recommendations to European countries

Structural Changes

- » Create an enabling learning environment for positive mental health and well-being, through developing and implementing mental health and psychosocial support policies in educational settings informed by learners' needs, voices and capacities.
- » Address risk factors for mental health, e.g., by implementing antibullying and anti-discrimination programmes.
- » Make sure that the educational culture is not based on competition, but is rather one where all learners and professionals feel included, supported and valued.

Skills

- » Embed mental health literacy and social and emotional learning in the curricula, from early childhood across the education system, including in the curricula of teaching staff and future health professionals.
- » Equip educational professionals with knowledge about concrete measures that they can put in place to respond to specific needs of students (i.e., reasonable accommodations, such as possibility to have extended deadlines for assignments in extenuating circumstances).
- » Ensure that school professionals are aware – and in contact – with the broader (families, social and health) network of support in the community (so that they can act as referral and/or collaborate).

WORK



Work is central to many people's lives and identities: it provides income, it can give a sense of meaning and inclusion to all, while also be an important part of the recovery process for people experiencing mental health problems. [Research](#) also shows that substantial reductions in productivity loss could potentially be achieved by promoting higher levels of mental health in the workplace.

Recommendations to European countries

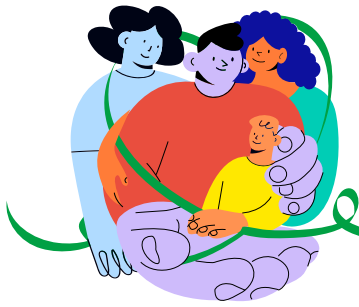
Structural Changes

- » Have policies in place for creating healthy workplaces which promote mental health, prevent work related stress, and ensure the provision of support if needed, moving away from simplistic measures that see mental health problems as uniquely pertaining to individual strengths.
- » Ensure that employers put in place reasonable adjustments for employees experiencing mental health problems or that are in the process of recovery.
- » Secure safe, supportive and decent working conditions for all.

Skills

- » Ensure the provision in work environments of trainings on mental health for employers, front line managers and employees (for instance, to identify needs and initiate conversations, respond appropriately with adequate support), moving away from approaches that focus on the individuals with the aim to "fix" them, and rather following approaches which investigate cultural and structural changes for long-term effects.





BROADER COMMUNITIES

Beyond home, education and employment, it is important to create supportive environments more broadly, reaching out for instance to community and faith-based leaders, volunteers, sports team, arts groups, youth clubs, women's groups, peers. Research indicates that community involvement, associative participation and the possibility to engage in community decisions is conducive to positive mental health at all ages. Moreover, community actors play an important role in addressing the mental health needs of the population, by providing timely, culturally appropriate first-line support.

Another community where people can find support and connections are online environments, which bring both opportunities and risks for mental health.

Recommendations to European countries

Structural Changes

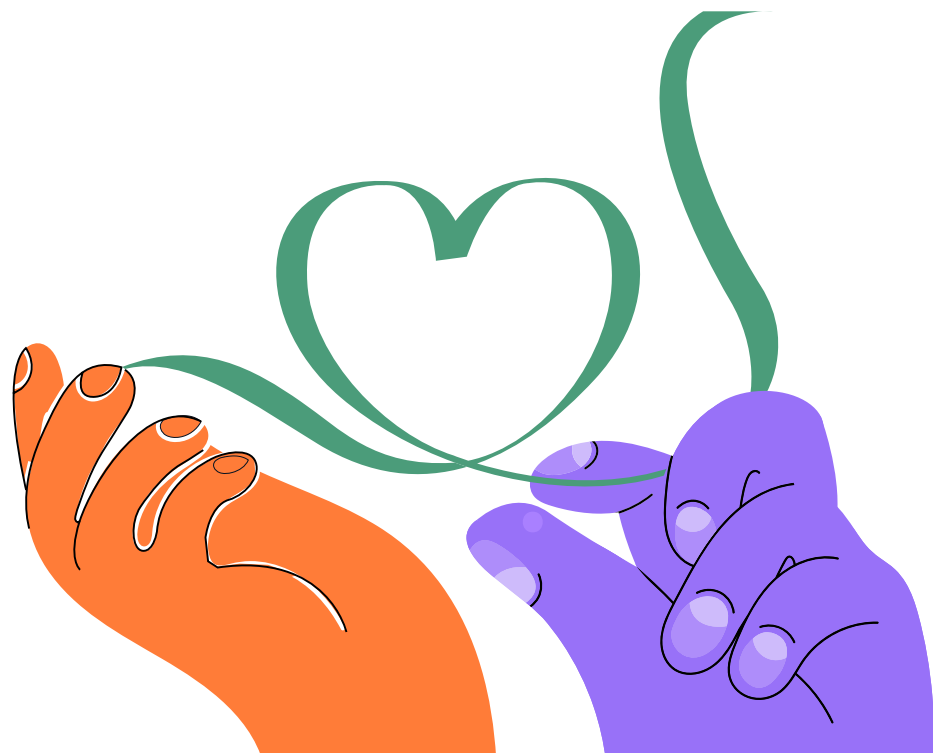
- » Establish an enabling environment for community providers. For instance, governments should make resources (i.e., funds and spaces) available to community-based initiatives that can activate and strengthen helpful community supports for people with mental health problems.
- » Ensure collaboration between health professionals and broader community actors (for instance with practices such as community referral).
- » Improve the quality of information presented and portrayed in the media, to fight stigma.
- » In relation to online communities, ensure that mental health considerations are included by design and by default in social media and other digital technologies.

Skills

- » Equip community actors with skills and understanding about mental health and its broader determinants, for instance by providing trainings to decision-makers, social care and health professionals.
- » Invest in digital literacy among the population, especially people in vulnerable situations (e.g., children and young people), including awareness about appropriate digital use and risks, in order to stay safe online.

Overarching recommendations to the EU

- » Develop a comprehensive, intersectional and multi-sectoral **Mental Health Strategy** including a clear timeline, adequate budget, objectives, as well as indicators to monitor progress across the EU Member States. This will ensure that the increasingly high value given to mental health is matched with commitment, engagement and investments. We recommend the European Commission to develop a European Mental Health Strategy as the subject of the upcoming initiative on a comprehensive approach to mental health announced by President von der Leyen in the 2022 State of the Union Address.
- » A **co-creation approach** needs to be followed when designing and implementing the upcoming initiative, ensuring that all relevant stakeholders are part of the process, including people with lived experience and their supporters.
- » Adopt a “**Mental Health in All Policies**” approach, when developing the upcoming initiative on a comprehensive approach to mental health, as well as in current and future policies, legislations and funding programmes. For instance, the ongoing negotiations on the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Act should take into account the best interest of the child and prevent any negative impact on their mental health and development.
- » Adopt an **EU Directive to address psychosocial risks at work**, taking a collective regulation approach over an individual one.
- » Establish a **European Year of Mental Health** to normalize the conversation around mental health and strengthen a better understanding of the broader determinants of mental health.





www.mhe-sme.org

Mental Health Europe (MHE) is the largest independent network organisation representing people with mental health problems, their supporters, care professionals, service providers and human rights experts in the field of mental health across Europe. Its vision is to strive for a Europe where everyone's mental health and wellbeing flourishes across their life course. Together with members and partners, MHE leads in advancing a human rights, community-based, recovery-oriented, and psychosocial approach to mental health and wellbeing for all.



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