



## **EUPHA's response to the European Commission's public consultation on 'A comprehensive approach to mental health'**

*15 February 2023*

Mental health issues have a profound impact on individuals, families, communities and societies, and cause a high burden of disease (1). The COVID-19 pandemic has been largely detrimental to the mental health condition of many groups of people in Europe, with vulnerable and at risk groups, such as older people, adolescents, migrants, refugees, people with substance abuse problems and psychiatric patients, more seriously affected. (2) That is why EUPHA's members identified mental health as a top priority for public health (3). EUPHA therefore welcomes and values the approach to put mental health in the spotlight of interest of policy makers in the European Union. However, it should be avoided to label human suffering as disorders and we would like to strengthen both a dimensional and systemic systemic lens approach to mental health conditions and mental health. (3) Mental health is much more than the absence of mental illness; this is one pillar of EUPHAs work on mental health. (4) Mental health and mental health conditions are dimensional, this is another pillar we can build on. (5) Furthermore, mental health and mental health conditions develop and change during life course and maybe even affected by pre-natal exposures. This fact underscores the importance of early, especially traumatic life events – including pre – natal – experiences in building a foundation for mental health. (7) Therefore, the focus on exposures during work and workplace related stress – even if it is very important highlights a limited perspective on mental health conditions. Additionally, mental disorders were once believed to be lifelong conditions, it is now clear that when individuals receive support and treatment they can and do recover. This perspective can be complemented by a public health systems perspective. The systems approach focusses on how mental health and mental health conditions are related and evolve not only the workplace, but in exposure and in interactions with family members, friends, communities, societies including the physical, chemical and built environment. To make the most of the European Commission mental health strategy in terms of improving mental health in the European region and reducing prevalence and severity of mental health conditions, EUPHA Public mental health Section supports activities where interventions might have huge impact including in families. We would like to contribute to a public health perspective and call to

- Promote mental health in a systemic perspective

- Strengthen family and positive parenting as they are contributors and mediators of positive mental health
- Promote that mental health goes beyond a focus on the individual
- Contribute to supporting public mental health research overcoming purely medical or psychological approaches
- Contribute to reducing stigma
- Contribute to the knowledge that mental health and behavior are dynamic and malleable
- Address mental health and mental health conditions influencing factors in a systemic way from a public health perspective
- Promote mentally healthy social and physical environments
- Bring together public health experts and mental health experts in research
- Advance mental health care by bringing together primary care and mental health specialized care

#### References:

1. GBD 2019 Mental Disorders Collaborators. Global, regional, and national burden of 12 mental disorders in 204 countries and territories, 1990-2019: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2019. *Lancet Psychiatry*. 2022 Feb;9(2):137-150. doi: 10.1016/S2215-0366(21)00395-3. Epub 2022 Jan 10. PMID: 35026139; PMCID: PMC8776563.
2. Mental Health in 2021: A summary report of the track on Mental Health at the 14th European Public Health conference 2021. EUPHA, 2022. Available at: [Track report mental health in 2021.pdf \(eupha.org\)](#)
3. Priorities in public health in the next 5 years. Infographic. EUPHA, 2022. Available at: [Questionnaire Infographic V1 \(eupha.org\)](#)
4. Lindert J, Carta MG, Schäfer I, Mollica RF. [Refugees mental health—A public mental health challenge](#). *Europ J Public Health* 2016;26(3): 374-375
5. Westerhof GJ, Keyes LM. Mental illness and mental health: The two continua model across the lifespan. *J Adult Dev* 2010;17(2): 110-119
6. Galderisis S, Heinz A, Kastrup M, Beezhold J, Sartorius N. Towards a new definition of mental health. *World Psychiatry* 2015, 14(2). 231-233. Adverse childhood experiences, childhood relationships and associated substance use and mental health in young Europeans. *Europ J Public Health* 29(4): 741-747
7. Wirback T, Möller J, Larsson J-O, Galanti R, Engström K. Social factors in childhood and risk of depressive symptoms among adolescents – a longitudinal study. *Europ J Public Health* 2014, 24(2)

For more information, please contact Jutta Lindert, vice-President of the EUPHA section on Public Mental Health or Marieke Verschuuren, EUPHA Executive Director, at [office@eupha.org](mailto:office@eupha.org).



The European Public Health Association (EUPHA) is the umbrella organisation for public health associations and institutes in Europe. EUPHA has 85 members from 47 countries. Our network brings together over 39,000 public health professionals. Our mission is to facilitate and activate a strong voice of the public health network by enhancing visibility of the evidence and by strengthening the capacity of public health professionals. EUPHA contributes to the preservation and improvement of public health in the European region through capacity and knowledge building. We are committed to creating a more inclusive Europe, narrowing all health inequalities among Europeans, by facilitating, activating, and disseminating strong evidence-based voices from the public health community and by strengthening the capacity of public health professionals to achieve evidence-based change.

**EUPHA** - European Public Health Association

**E-mail** [office@eupha.org](mailto:office@eupha.org)

**Internet** [www.eupha.org](http://www.eupha.org)

**Twitter** @EUPHActs



**Co-funded by  
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or HaDEA. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.