

Mental health

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The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety adopted a report drafted by Evangelia TZAMPAZI (PES, EL) on Mental Health. It noted that mental health problems are widespread in Europe with 1 in 4 people experiencing mental health problems at least once in their lives, while many more are indirectly affected. The standard of mental health care varies considerably between different Member States, especially between the old and some of the new Member States. The report also noted that suicide remains a significant cause of premature death in Europe, with over 50,000 deaths a year in the EU. In 9 out of 10 cases, it is preceded by the development of mental disorders, frequently depression. Moreover, the rate of suicide and attempted suicide among people who are in prison or in detention is higher than among the general population.

The committee welcomed the European Pact on Mental Health and Well-Being, established in June 2008 and the recognition of mental health and well-being as a basic priority for action.

The report contains a number of general recommendations to promote the mental health and well-being of the population, to combat stigma, discrimination and social exclusion, to strengthen preventive action and self-help and to provide support and adequate treatment for people with mental health problems, their families and carers. It also contains specific recommendations in the five priority areas identified by the European Pact. These areas are: prevention of suicide and depression; mental health in youth and education; mental health in workplace settings; mental health of older people; and combating stigma and social exclusion.

In order to promote the mental health and well-being of the population, the committee:

- calls for cooperation between the EU institutions, Member States, local and regional bodies and the social partners in the five priority areas referred to in the European Pact;
- proposes the adoption of an EU Platform on Mental Health and Well-being, to monitor and coordinate measures to implement the Pact and calls on the Commission to present the conclusions of the conferences to be held in the context of implementing the Pact;
- stresses the need for a 'European Action Plan on the Mental Health and Well-Being of Citizens and Medical Research ' and the need to produce appropriate mental health indicators with a view to improving the assessment of needs at national and European level;
- calls for optimum use of the available Community and national resources to promote mental health through the funding of research into prevention, new structures for decent care and effective treatment of mental illnesses, and labour market integration programmes;
- stresses the need to provide high-quality, accessible, effective and universal mental health services;
- calls for emphasis to be placed on the training of everyone in key positions relating to mental health;
- calls for access to appropriate education, training and employment for people with mental health problems and the creation of a supportive and favourable environment throughout life, with particular emphasis on the most vulnerable groups.