

CoR INTERREGIONAL GROUP ON HEALTH & WELL-BEING

“Towards a European Strategy on mental health”

Thursday, 1 December 2022, 8:00 – 9:00

Online meeting

Minutes

8.00 Welcome and introduction by the Chair, Birgitta Sacrédeus

The Chair of the Interregional Group, **Birgitta Sacrédeus**, welcomed all the participants and explained that the meeting was organised to discuss mental health policies in the EU and exchange opinions between the European institutions and stakeholders on tracing a path towards a European strategy on mental health. The event was structured around two speeches from Francesca Centola, Policy and Knowledge Officer at Mental Health Europe, and Isabelle Johansson, Head of Region Östergötland’s EU Office (Sweden).

8.05 “Towards better mental health across Europe: which way to go?” by Francesca Centola

Francesca Centola started her speech by giving an overview of the socio-economic and environmental determinants that act as risk factors (poverty, unemployment, violence, etc.) or protective factors (quality education, community cohesion, etc.) for mental health. According to Mental Health Europe, the European Union has a paramount role in supporting the Members States in creating the conditions for positive **mental health in all policies** and throughout the entire pathway, from prevention to diagnosis, treatment, and post-treatment. Ms Centola also looked at the economic perspective: according to the OECD, mental ill health costs 600 billion EUR, more than 4% of GDP across 28 European countries. In this perspective, she stressed the need for an inclusive approach, with mental health services aiming at guaranteeing the following **principles**: community-based, integrated for a holistic approach, respectful of human rights, and co-created with people with lived experiences. The pandemic made clear the need to act on protective factors as well, and a relevant gap between mental health care needs and the offer has been detected, as well as the need to sustain more vulnerable groups. To fill this gap, it is important to resort to innovative solutions such as the **digitalization** of health services. Finally, she underlined the efforts of DG SANTE to include mental health in the *Healthier Together – Non-communicable Diseases Initiative*, which stands as an important step to raise awareness and fight stigma, and presented some of the upcoming activities of

the **Mental Health Advocacy Platform**, led by Mental Health Europe, whose aim is to boost the exchange of knowledge. Finally, she announced two upcoming appointments on the Mental Health in all Policies Thematic Network hosted by the EU Health Policy Platform: on 11 January, a webinar on mental health and digital, and, in February, a webinar on mental health and environment.

8.20 “Implementation of cognitive behavioural therapy in health care: an example from Region Östergötland (SE)” by Isabelle Johansson

Isabelle Johansson presented a best practice from Sweden. The Swedish National Organization for Digital Services, INERA - owned by regions and municipalities - developed a digital infrastructure in support of healthcare services (e.g., receipts, consultations, online treatments, etc.). Among the features, the platform contains programs for cognitive behavioral therapy, to address several conditions such as depression and anxiety. Thanks to this solution, the patient can go through the material on their personal devices and be in contact with practitioners and healthcare professionals. This online cognitive behavioral treatment has recorded high rates of demand, especially for the flexibility it gives to both patients and professionals, and the trend in its use is still growing. According to the assessments, it renders similar clinical results as in-person treatment and has the advantage of retaining the material even after the treatment. The digitalisation of this treatment allows professionals to have three times bigger patient capacity, to adapt time allocation to patients according to needs, and to standardized treatment. Increased capacity means early treatment, which can prevent a more serious condition.

8:30 Open Debate

From the debate, it emerged the importance of regions as key players in the promotion of mental health, and much emphasis has been placed on the exchange of good practices and how to adapt them according to regional contexts. Digitalisation is an element that can bring many advantages in this field, and it has been emphasized its efficiency especially if designed and implemented in a complementary way with in-person services. One discussion point was about the concept of co-creation and how decision-makers can interface with patients to include their vision in policy development to improve health services and set priorities in expenditures.

9:00 End of the meeting