

Mental Health Matters

The Congress of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party convening in Dublin, Ireland, on 2-4 June 2022:

Noting that:

- mental health is a prerequisite for a self-determined and self-reliant life. At the same time, people with mental illnesses are often stigmatised and assistance is difficult to obtain or even completely lacking;
- regardless of whether there is a physical or mental impairment, everyone should have the opportunity to achieve as much as they can and want to;
- European liberals are committed to breaking down stigmas, counter prejudices, and improve care for those affected;
- the COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing has led to a higher number of mental health cases, especially affecting young people;
- the consequences of the disruptive impact on socio-economic factors induced by the pandemic and the current crisis associated to the war are expected to exacerbate mental disorders at all ages.

Considering that:

- mental health patients should have the same rights and care as physical health patients;
- access to mental healthcare is equally important as access to physical healthcare;
- several European states include mental healthcare in their health coverage;
- although increases in the coverage of primary and specialist mental health services lead to growing costs for health systems, treatment and prevention of mental disorders result in net economic savings which accrue to both health and other sectors even in the short term;
- significant efforts have been made by the countries in Europe and the European Union, in collaboration with other international organisations such as the WHO and the OECD, to improve the mental health of their populations, efforts recognised by the Health at a Glance: Europe 2020 report and the European Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020;
- the European Commission has established a Steering Group on Health Promotion, Disease Prevention, and Management of Non-Communicable Diseases to provide advice and expertise to the Commission on developing and implementing activities in the field of health promotion, disease prevention, and the management of non-communicable diseases. It also fosters exchanges of relevant experience, policies, and practices between the Member States;

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- the effects of mental diseases and disorders, also when on a temporary basis, may have catastrophic effect especially when involving people occupied in crucial professions that can put in danger the life of others/communities (e.g.: pilots, bus drivers, workers in a nuclear central, etc...) if not timely identified and properly tackled.

Believing that:

- especially for people who do not have access to a local psychological outpatient clinic, it is difficult to take the first step and seek and find professional help;
- to this day there are a lot of prejudices about the validity and relevance of mental disorders. Often problems are diminished or not taken seriously. People still have to reckon with a stigma or negative consequences;
- mental health must have a firm place in the view of the leadership at all kinds of facilities and organisations;
- prevention programmes are of great importance in order to be able to detect disorders and to develop individual strategies for dealing with them. Early childhood stress can greatly increase the likelihood of developing depression, diabetes, and other diseases later on. Attention should be paid to the mental health of children and adolescents already during their school years;
- training and educational facilities have an easier access to young people and can have the most direct impact.

Calls for:

- the EU Steering Group on Health Promotion, Disease Prevention and Management of Noncommunicable Diseases to put a further emphasis on the situation of young people;
- Renew Europe and ALDE member parties to address the topic of mental health in their parliamentary work. Special attention to young people whose mental health has decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic should be given;
- national and local governments to extend the offers of psychosocial support in the different training and educational facilities;
- ALDE and its member parties to support incentives to promote having a psychologist on staff for the above mentioned facilities, who can be consulted on an occasional basis and who can refer, if the need arises, to further specialists;
- ALDE and its member parties to support further training opportunities for the staff of education facilities to prevent mental health issues and counter stigmatisation, thereby supporting the staff as role models

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incentives for young people to become mental health professionals as there is a lack of personnel;

- Member States to encourage an increased availability of study programmes in the field of psychology as well as a higher number of professorships in the field. Member States should harmonise some of the requirements for study programmes in the field of psychology in Europe;
- ALDE and its member parties to support an easy and secure digital access to online psychological counselling in educational facilities. Data protection and the anonymity of the individual must be guaranteed at all times;
- the European Commission to develop a campaign and provide information material on how to take care of one's mental health and where to find help;
- the European Commission to develop a strategy for the implementation at national level of well-being programs for the prevention of mental disorders with particular attention to the professions with a potential and direct impact on the safety of other EU citizens;
- the European Commission to promote the establishment of dedicated structures that, under a non-blaming and just-culture scheme, are dedicated to the early detection of symptoms of mental diseases and disorders, only aimed to assist and help the people affected, with special focus given to all professions where misconducts may have a serious impact on the safety of the EU citizens;
- decision-makers to integrate information on mental health issues (e.g. bullying, sexual harassment, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, stress resilience, suicidal thoughts) and how to tackle them into school curricula and into the curricula of all relevant courses of study (teachers, social workers, etc.) Children should also be taught stress management techniques;
- Government responses to crises such as major pandemics shall pay due account to potential effects on mental health.

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