

CALL FOR ACTION: Strengthening Mental Health in the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has been ongoing for more than a year and is affecting everyone's daily life. Social distancing and lockdown measures, home schooling and work at home, compatibility of work and childcare, as well as existential fears, short time work, and unemployment, can overwhelm psychological resistance and regeneration.

As a result, depressive disorders, anxiety disorders and stress disorders, alcohol dependence and substance abuse, and suicides increase. It becomes clear that the pandemic poses a serious threat to mental health and subsequently, the need of early diagnosis and adequate treatment must be met to strengthen wellbeing and the ability to work, and to prevent early retirement.

The EU-wide availability of welfare state support services will have a decisive influence on whether the health and economic consequences of the pandemic and its psychological effects can be absorbed. Although the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health is part of political discussions, concrete political actions are still scarce.

The NPCE calls on the EU to:

- Improve data collection on mental health issues and mental disorders associated with the COVID-19 pandemic by extending the ECDC mandate.
- Establish an Ad-hoc Task Force at the ECDC analysing data on mental health and writing a report on mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic in the EU, including prognoses on the development of the prevalence of mental health disorders.
- Establish a Joint Action on mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic, assessing the EU-wide challenges and developing recommendations on the prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of people suffering from mental disorders, including the specific needs of people with post-acute COVID-19 syndrome.
- Ensure sufficient funding for (psychotherapeutic) research on the impact of the pandemic on mental health, the prevention and treatment of mental disorders, and rehabilitation of people with mental health disorders and post-acute COVID-19 syndrome.

Furthermore, the NPCE calls on the Member States to:

- Ensure timely access to and funding for psychotherapy services for all people in need of psychotherapeutic support and increase the psychotherapeutic service capacities.
- Facilitate the use of digital tools embedded in psychotherapeutic treatment, such as video treatment or effective digital applications.
- Be aware of the special needs of people with mental disorders during the pandemic when implementing hygiene and safety rules, ensuring access to and availability of social and healthcare services, as well as timely access to vaccination, and providing free face masks and COVID-19 tests.
- Develop, implement, and strengthen specific (psychotherapeutic) support services and prevention programs for vulnerable groups, such as healthcare professionals, children and adolescents, families in socioeconomic hardship, the elderly, and homeless people (with mental disorders).