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MENTAL HEALTH

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health¹ as “a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community”. In September 2022, [President von der Leyen announced](#) a “new initiative on mental health [where] we should take better care of each other. And for many who feel anxious and lost, appropriate, accessible and affordable support can make all the difference”.

Delivering on this, the Commission adds a pillar to the European Health Union: [a new comprehensive approach to mental health](#). **This approach** is a first and important step to **put mental health on par with physical health** and to ensure a **new, cross sectoral approach** to mental health issues. With 20 flagship initiatives and €1.23 billion in EU funding from different financial instruments, the Commission will support Member States putting people and their mental health first.

WHY DO WE NEED RESEARCH AND INNOVATION ON MENTAL HEALTH?

Mental health is a complex societal challenge. Mental ill health can affect different population groups and people at all stages of life. A comprehensive approach to mental health is needed with policies in different areas to improve mental health and support resilience. These include policies in health, education, social protection, arts and culture, or employment. Research and innovation (R&I) play a key role in delivering solutions tailored to the specific needs of people struggling with their mental health. R&I also provide the evidence needed for the development

of effective policies to counter mental health-related challenges and how best to boost the resilience of people. This applies not only to the area of health but also in other areas like arts and culture, education at all levels, environment (e.g. urban), digital well-being and digital tools. Arts and culture provide creative ways to address mental health of different population groups, including vulnerable groups, to promote and support people’s well-being and good mental health for all, ultimately promoting an inclusive and fair European society.

Research and innovation make a difference in

- providing a better understanding of mental health and illness;
- providing evidence for how to best promote mental health, resilience and well-being in various target populations (e.g. youth, or older adults);
- addressing specific situations (e.g. those created by the COVID-19 pandemic) and environments (e.g. at the workplace, or in schools).

Funding research and innovation on mental health has been a long-standing priority for the EU, and continues to be a priority under Horizon Europe.

¹ WHO’s mental health [factsheet](#)



Research and innovation projects delivering concrete solutions and new knowledge on mental health

Examples of EU-funded research and innovation projects contributing to various themes under mental health:

THEME 1:

Promotion of mental health, prevention and early detection of mental ill health

RECETAS investigates nature-based social prescribing in six cities in Europe, Latin America and Australia to address loneliness and social isolation, as this can shorten one's life, similar to smoking or obesity. This mental risk knows no geographic or cultural boundaries and affects all age groups. Loneliness triggers depression and anxiety and adds to the burden posed by other chronic diseases. The [project's](#) decision-analytic model delivers recommendations for health policy and best practice guidelines to enhance civic participation, social connectivity and well-being.

ARTIS studies the impacts on well-being and mental health of engaging with online arts and culture, especially during the Covid lockdowns. First findings show that even a brief visit of 1 to 2 minutes to an online display of a painting significantly improves mood, lowers anxiety and loneliness. The project harnesses the societal impact of the arts and quantifies the impact of artistic interventions for the mental well-being of people.



THEME 2:

Mental health of children and young people



UPRIGHT developed school-based mental health interventions to enhance resilience in teenagers (through effective coping skills, social emotional learning, mindfulness), their families (positive parenting skills), and teachers. Manuals and supporting materials on the interventions were published in different languages and on a dedicated [web platform](#), as well as on the School Education Gateway, as part of the [European Toolkit for Schools](#) that also promotes inclusive education.

Addressed to refugee and asylum seeker children, the EU-funded project **REFUGE-ED** identifies, implements, and evaluates effective practices in education and mental health across 46 pilot projects. REFUGE-ED links two disciplines: education, and mental health and psychosocial support to provide tools for better education, improved well-being and social belonging. In the field of education, the project focuses on implementing Successful Educational Actions for enhancing the mental health of children and young people.

THEME 3:

Helping those most in need

RefugeesWellSchool developed school-based interventions to promote refugee and migrant adolescents' mental health and well-being by enhancing social support and cohesion. These include school-mediation intervention, classroom drama therapy and social support groups in refugee classes. An online toolkit and [manuals](#) in different languages were developed, and the interventions were also published on the [School Education Gateway](#), as part of the [European Toolkit for Schools](#). With the recent crisis in Ukraine, schools and policymakers were informed about how these interventions can be implemented.



SENSE-Cog developed clinical assessment tools enabling doctors to more effectively support older adults having a combination of hearing, sight and thinking difficulties, which together can profoundly impact their mental health. An online [toolkit](#) was developed for healthcare professionals, including an adapted cognitive assessment for people with hearing or vision impairment, and a tool for profiling functional performance capacity (of everyday activities) for better support of people with dementia. The tools have been transferred and adapted for studies globally, including in [Asia](#) and [Australia](#).



THEME 4:

Tackling psychosocial risks at work



MENTUPP develops an intervention programme for SMEs (“MENTUPP Hub”) to promote mental health in the workplace, focussing on depression, anxiety, burnout, suicide and stress. The programme proposes specific roles for managers concerning communication and resource allocation and it stimulates employees to seek professional help. The “MENTUPP Hub”, currently in test phase, is an interactive and evidence-based platform on the [project’s website](#) that makes tailored materials available for employees, managers and the entire workplace. It includes quizzes and interactive videos. Public access to the hub, as well as policy recommendations and implementation guidelines for employers/SMEs are expected by Q4 2023.

THEME 5:

Reforming mental health systems and improving access to treatment and care

RESPOND identifies risks of negative consequences on mental health of major societal crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and identifies the most effective strategies to improve the society’s preparedness. It is developing an impact framework for governments to rapidly assess system responsiveness, resilience and preparedness. The framework deals with indicators such as suicide-rates, domestic violence, vulnerability of specific groups, etc. that can capture the evolving mental health status of the society and is expected to be finalised in Q2 2024. Moreover, selected [WHO’s Scalable psychological interventions for people in communities affected by adversity](#), adapted to the context of the pandemic, are being tested among migrants, refugees, health workers and other groups that have been strongly affected by the pandemic.

PREFERABLE-II develops a supportive care programme for cancer survivors to enhance their quality of life and mental health through a [personalised live-remote physical exercise training](#) for all survivors who cannot join on-site supervised training. Specific needs of survivors are addressed as they suffer from long-term side effects such as fatigue, low physical fitness, anxiety and depression and low productivity. Patient-centred communication and decision making make the difference and lead to new guideline recommendations for exercise-oncology.



MORE INFORMATION

on EU-funded projects on mental health is available at [cordis.europa.eu](#)

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