

## PRESS RELEASE

From 25 to 27 September, 2023 Murcia hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Consortium and Coinciding General Assembly, Stakeholder Forum and Member State Policy Committee Meetings of the JA ImpleMENTAL project



In recent years, events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the rise in living costs, the war in Ukraine, digitalisation and the climate change have further aggravated the mental health situation in the EU. Most people with mental disorders do not have access to effective care. Many people also experience stigma, discrimination and violations of human rights. According to The Health at a Glance: Europe 2022 report half of all young Europeans reported unmet mental health needs and that depression among young people had more than doubled. The OECD estimated that the economic burden of mental ill-health can rise up to 4% of GDP in the EU Member States. Mental health problems and different anxiety disorders affect more than one in six people across the EU. This highlights the importance of good mental health promotion, the prevention and early detection of mental problems, increased treatment and care in community settings and the sharing of good practices.

Mental health is a priority for the European Commission. The third Health Programme supports Member States in transferring best practices on mental health systems reforms and suicide prevention via the Joint Action on Implementation of Best Practices in the area of Mental Health (JA ImpleMENTAL).

The second Annual Consortium Meeting of JA ImpleMENTAL was organised by the Coordinator of the Joint Action, the National Public Health Organisation, Greece and co-organised by the Foundation for Health Training and Research of the Region of Murcia/IMIB/SMS. The event was opened by **Stella**

Kyriakides, European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety. The online speech is available at the following link: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH\\_23\\_4605](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_23_4605)

The meeting was addressed by **Dimitrios Vartzopoulos**, Deputy Minister of Health of the Hellenic Republic, who underlined: "JA ImpleMENTAL will strongly help us to enhance the reform of our national mental health systems. Our Authorities of course will tailor and customize these best practices according to their actual needs, finances and human resources. Greece has drawn up a 10year National Mental Health Policy Plan which is fully aligned with the WHO European Action framework for Mental Health. The goal is the transition of the remaining psychiatric hospitals into modern community networks of psychosocial services that will provide the necessary specialized services, monitor and shape the patient's calls from the first moment she/he enters the system and to guarantee social integration and the elimination of stigma. With the recent announcement of the European Commission on Mental Health and the significant funding of 1.2 billion the Union now has the tools to support and develop homogenous and cost effective services in every Member State."

**Dimitrios Paraskevis**, Professor of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine, Board member of Nation Public Health Organization, Greece highlighted in his speech that according to modern conceptualizations, mental health should no longer be viewed as the responsibility of the health authorities alone, rather it involves all policies and sectors. For a successful and sustainable mental health reform, cultural change is the most laborious, time-consuming and difficult goal to achieve. This cannot be circumvented without a public health approach with its strategic vision, tools and goals. The Implementation Strategy of the JA helps to transfer and embed the best practices in a new environment.

The government of the region of Murcia maintains a strong commitment to mental health. It has recently published *The Strategy for the Improvement of Mental Health 2023-2026* which is based on the transformation of services towards more proximity and rights-based intervention models, paying special attention to the good mental health promotion and prevention of mental health problems as well as to supporting vulnerable groups.

**Juan José Pedreño Planes**, Councillor of Health of Murcia: "Thanks for choosing the Region of Murcia as the venue of the second Annual Consortium Meeting. JA ImpleMENTAL provides the great opportunity to adapt best practices concerning mental health and suicide prevention. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased mental health problems. The development plan of Murcia Region has several axis. One of them is specifically dedicated to suicide prevention and young patients with suicidal intents. We hope to meet the expectations and celebrate Mental Health Day together."

**Pilar Aparicio Azcárraga**, Representative of the Ministry of Health Spain underlined: "I would like to thank you for your availability to discuss mental health issues in person. We developed action plans in order to implement the best practices, so that we can help people to cope with their mental health problems. Thank you for choosing our country to visit. As I have just mentioned our Health Department is working on developing an Action Plan to facilitate the strategic lines of the implementations. In the near future we will highlight suicide prevention measures for the vulnerable people and the adolescents."

Other dignities who honoured and greeted the event included: **Isabel Ayala Viguera**s, Director of Servicio Murciano de Salud, **Concepción Ruiz Caballero**, Councillor of Social Policy, Families and Equality, and **Maria Jose Lozano Semitiel**, Manager Director of Mental Health, SMS.

The meeting took place in the conference hall of the "Hospital General Universitario Reina Sofia" and maintained by the Murcian Health Service. There were over 200 participants: members of the JA ImpleMENTAL country teams (17 EU Member States, 2 EEA countries and 1 EU candidate country),

nominated Member State Policy Committee members from ministries, and Stakeholder Forum representatives from different key European organisations across Europe (such as EUCOMS, EUFAMI, Euro Healthnet, GAMIAN-Europe, IASP, MHE, EAAD best, EUPHA Public mental health section, ENUSP, EPA) and WHO Europe and OECD. They were joined also by more than 60 Spanish/Region of Murcia key stakeholders, who attended in person or joined online to hear about the progress achieved by the project in the second year of its implementation.

The first day of the second Annual Consortium meeting focused on providing better insight into national implementation of the **Belgian Best Practice community mental health system reform**, whereas the second day was dedicated to the national implementation of **the Austrian Best practice on Suicide Prevention "SUPRA"**, addressing challenges and opportunities and gathering positive outcomes generated by the implementation of the two best practices. National activities across the 20 participating countries were shared. The fact that in the framework of JA ImpleMENTAL 17 new or renewed suicide prevention plans across Europe will be formulated and 14 countries are going to pilot and implement changes in their community mental health services, was assessed by participants as a major step.

The dedicated meetings of the Stakeholder Forum and the Member State Policy Committee on the third day were built on the activities of the two previous days and helped not only to provide areas of synergies with other ongoing initiatives, but also gave guidance to JA ImpleMENTAL in the implementation for the last year of the project.

The event provided a unique opportunity to share knowledge and experiences with each other, discuss the overview of the process, the actual development of community-based services, and the challenges and positive outcomes such as the improvement of the collaboration with stakeholders

One of the main gains of ImpleMENTAL is the creation of a strong international network that provides opportunity to share the synergies created through the network activities. As a next step, messages towards policymakers will be shaped based on lessons learned in the EU. Key recommendations will be outlined in the form of national and local strategies after the end of the project.

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#### About JA ImpleMENTAL

The Joint Action involves 39 participating organisations from competent authorities in 21 EU/EEA countries and supports them to establish local networks for mental health and to strengthen community-based provision of preventive care services across sectors in order to improve access to a sustainable quality of care. JA ImpleMENTAL is focusing on the transfer and implementation of two best practices: (1) mental health reform in Belgium based on the principle of deinstitutionalization, the transition from primarily institutional care to community-based care in order to improve mental health outcomes and quality of life and avoid unnecessary hospitalizations, and (2) Suicide Prevention Austria (SUPRA), a multi-level suicide prevention strategy that integrates universal, selective and indicated prevention interventions, based on the local implementation context and building upon existing resources and initiatives. The activities of the JA ImpleMENTAL strongly support the new Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health, which aims to put mental health on par with physical health and to ensure a cross-sectorial approach to mental health issues.

JA ImpleMENTAL is committed to improve the quality of life of people living with mental problems and illnesses with the involvement of all parties concerned.

For further information on JA ImpleMENTAL project: <https://ja-imental.eu/>