



Opening Remarks by Commissioner Stella Kyriakides at European Parliament Event; "A Comprehensive Approach to Mental Health in Europe"

Honourable Members, Colleagues, Friends,

Brussels, 21 March 2023

Thank you for the invitation to be here today at an event that brings us together at a time when mental health is more than ever a public health challenge.

I want to truly thank the Coalition for Mental Health and Wellbeing and the MEP Alliance for Mental Health for the ongoing efforts to break the silence and keep mental health challenges high on the

political agenda.

Our societies are still recovering from an unprecedented pandemic which changed everything, affecting all age groups, children adolescents, the elderly, changing our lives and impacting the most vulnerable.

War on our continent due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its far-reaching consequences are the sources of ongoing anxiety, taking a heavy toll on citizens mental health in many different ways. The need for us to act now could not be clearer.

Last December's Health at a Glance report revealed that:

Half of all young Europeans reported unmet mental health needs; and depression among young people had more than doubled. These are extremely alarming figures.

As MEP Engerer and MEP Zdechovský have said, concerted action is both necessary and possible. This year in June we will present the first ever EU comprehensive approach to mental health. For many of us here today, as lifetime advocates on the need to prioritise and act on mental health, this is a very important moment.

This is an opportunity to act and respond to tangible expectations from our citizens. This initiative will build on the recommendations from citizens at the Conference on the Future of Europe; and respond to the European Parliament's repeated calls to step up action on mental health.

We are, however, not starting from scratch as the Commission has, over the last 25 years, implemented many initiatives on mental health and offered numerous funding opportunities.

Let me just share with you a few.

Over the last three years, EU4Health has provided over EUR 30 million in support for mental health. 18 million euro in our 2023 work programme is available to support our comprehensive approach to mental health in the EU.

In December 2021, we launched the Healthier Together initiative, with one of its five strands specifically covering mental health - Co-created with national authorities and stakeholders, it has dedicated financial support from the EU4Health programme.

Vulnerable groups, including cancer patients and displaced people from Ukraine, will be among those receiving support. But it is clear we need to do more and in a comprehensive way and this is what we will be presenting in June, to support and complement action at Member State and regional level.

Towards this, Member States are consulted in the Expert Group on Public Health, and they strongly support EU action to promote good mental health, prevention and better access to treatment and care.

Stakeholders and citizens participated in a recent Call for Evidence. 313 responses highlighted the need to reinforce better promotion and prevention; skills development through training; education and awareness-raising, including de-stigmatisation; improved and equal access to care; health at work, including burnout prevention; and a better understanding of social and environmental determinants.

A strong focus will be placed on vulnerable groups – including children, young people and the elderly. We have also organised large, targeted webinars with stakeholders- The next will take place on 21 April.

We will continue providing financial support to Member States and stakeholders. In parallel, we have launched projects with the WHO and the OECD offering technical assistance and capacity-building for Member States to transfer and exchange best practices on mental health. We have drawn up a survey with the World Health Organization to assess the capacity of national mental health systems. Its findings will form the basis for tailored support for each individual Member State.

Additionally, a major funding project of almost 30 million euro has been launched with the Red Cross to support the mental health of displaced Ukrainian people as they struggle with the impact of the unjustified Russian war of aggression on their lives.

Colleagues, Friends,

Mental health is inextricable from our overall approach to public health. We all now have an opportunity. To rise to the challenge and put mental health at the heart of all our policies, making it a political priority into the next years. This is about the next generations, this is about prevention, this is about investing for the future by breaking the silence in the presence and acting now. Actions need to be targeted and implementable.

The European Parliament is a key player here. NGOs are the voices, often of those who are silenced. Member States can make this a political priority.

Thank you all for being here and part of this journey.

We cannot afford to wait any longer. We need to act now.