

Closing Conference of Joint Action ImpleMENTAL - organised by the lead coordinator, the National Public Health Organisation, Greece – took place in Athens to highlight the impact achieved by the JA



From 17 to 19 September, the National Public Health Organisation (NPHO) was hosting 150 participants onsite in Athens who were joined by 100 participants online at the closing conference of the Joint Action (JA) ImpleMENTAL.

Co-funded under the EU Third health programme and managed by the European Health and Digital Executive Agency (HaDEA), the project has involved 39 partners from 18 EU countries and 2 EEA countries and 1 EU candidate country, for a total budget of €6.7 million.

During the 3-year implementation of JA ImpleMENTAL, two best practices were implemented: one in the field of mental health community-based systems (from Belgium) and one on suicide prevention (from Austria). These were adapted to the 21 EU countries part of the consortium and a total of 25 pilots in 20 countries were developed. 14 new or renewed suicide prevention plans were formulated, and 11 countries were piloting and implementing changes in their community mental health services. Partner countries have revised their information systems, enhanced user participation in the delivery of services, and mobilised community resources.

Detailed information on the agenda and the country pilots and activities of participating non-implementing countries were visualised on posters exhibited at the conference, and also uploaded to the website: <https://ja-imental.eu/participating-countries-great-achievements/>

Ms. Marina Zanchi, Director of HaDEA underlined in her video message that “JA ImpleMENTAL has clearly shown to us the importance of multi-stakeholder engagement to align mental health interventions with patient needs, the relevance of community-based approach in mental health care and the significance of peer-learning and capacity-building while dealing with uncertainty.” “In this respect, I believe you all did a very good job as consortium members”, she concluded.

The video can be seen at: <https://ja-imental.eu/marina-zanchi-director-of-the-health-and-digital-executive-agency-hadea-welcome-speech/>

Stefan Schreck, Advisor for Stakeholder relations, DG SANTE welcomed the participants and acknowledged the efforts of the JA in his greetings broadcasted online.

The first day of the conference was kicked off by the Alt. Minister of Health of the Hellenic Republic, **Ms Eirini Agapidaki** who said that “*The European Joint Action ImpleMENTAL is an excellent example of European cooperation aimed at strengthening national health systems on mental health issues and implementing innovative practices such as suicide prevention and mental health service reforms. It is an honour for our country, through the National Public Health Organization (EODY), to take on a coordinating role in this effort, supporting the meaningful commitment of member states and collaboration with pan-European organizations*” emphasized Ms. Agapidaki.

Other dignities who sent message to the opening of the closing event included Deputy Minister of Health of the Hellenic Republic, **Dimitrios Vartzopoulos**. Mr Vartzopoulos highlighted the “landmark law” recently introduced into Greek legislation, which tackles the long-standing issue of the fragmented and disjointed administration of Mental Health and Addiction Services in the country: “We are ensuring that every citizen’s needs are met where they live, with immediate access to quality mental health services, while also fighting stigma through prevention and mental health promotion programs” stated the Dep. Minister.

In his welcome address, **Prof. Christos Hadjichristodoulou**, President of the Board of Directors of the Hellenic National Public Health Organization (NPHO) remarked: “*As we reach the completion of the JA, the scientific achievements and the networks we’ve established are promising indicators of its potential to become a landmark program for mental health reform in Europe. I am particularly proud that the National Public Health Organization has played a pivotal role in this endeavour, overseeing the overall coordination*”.

Natasha Azzopardi Muscat, Director, Division of Country Health Policies and Systems, WHO Regional Office for Europe addressed the closing conference in a recorded video message that can be seen at:

<https://ja-imental.eu/dr-natasha-azzopardi-muscat-who-europe-welcome-speech/>

“*We had a shared vision and created a strong network to provide better quality of care and life for people with mental health challenges*” said **Vasileia Konte**, MD, head of the Directorate of Services at NPHO Greece and JA ImpleMENTAL Coordinator, who summed up implementation and achieved results. Ms. Konte highlighted collaboration and involvement of the 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), international organisations (WHO Europe and OECD) and the Member State Policy Committee (MSPC) members, as well as the additional support of WHO with trainings and joint events such as Quality Rights training in Vilnius and the Workshop on leadership and service transformation in mental health: creating synergies between JA ImpleMENTAL and the pan-European Mental Health Coalition. This resulted in a strong network, enhanced sharing experiences and knowledge increase and paved the way for necessary changes based on the newly formulated national mental health policy strategies.

JA ImpleMENTAL’s scope also included training and capacity-building efforts, bringing mental health to the forefront, to improve the quality of care in mental health and related services. As a result, almost

1000 persons participated in 9 trainings on SUPRA best practice including participants from outside the JA ImpleMENTAL network, mainly from Ukraine. **More than 600 mental health professionals received training at 16 workshops and conferences on the Belgian best practice.** This has been a significant contribution to improve mental health workforce's knowledge and changing the culture of services towards a recovery-oriented, human rights-based approach, breaking the stigma and discrimination surrounding mental health in general.

The closing conference was a unique opportunity to summarise and share the impact of JA ImpleMENTAL's work, highlight achievements and show how the developed sustainability action plans based on Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles are aligned with the national mental health strategies. Participants also discuss the post-implementation phase, monitoring and evaluation aspects focusing on how sustainability plans can be derived, providing a country-specific roadmap for long-term success and stability, and how country pilots can serve as a landmark for the future continuation of the work at national level.

About JA Implemental:

The Joint Action (JA) ImpleMENTAL, co-funded by the European Union Third health programme with a financial contribution of €5.4 million, was launched at the end of 2021. It was one of the EU initiatives to answer the aggravated mental health situation that affected around 84 million people in the EU at the time, caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic and energy crises, as well as the war of aggression against Ukraine.

JA ImpleMENTAL brought together 39 participating organisations from competent authorities of 21 EU/EEA countries and rolled out the transfer and implementation of two best practices in mental health, chosen from the European Commission's Best Practice Portal: Mental Health Reform in Belgium and Suicide Prevention Austria (SUPRA) with the aim to extend the benefits, transfer and implementation of the two above practices as pilots and assisted health system reform in the participating countries by strengthening community-based preventive care services across sectors, improving access to a sustainable quality of care, as well as enhancing multilevel national suicide prevention programmes.

Further information:

<https://ja-imental.eu/>

<https://www.facebook.com/ja.imental.eu/>

https://x.com/JA_ImpleMental

<https://www.instagram.com/ja.imental/>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsMTNXO98B3vJxck2Ur-eVQ>