



European Parliament Interest Group on Mental Health

Wednesday 28 April 2010, 14.00 – 15.00

Welcome and introduction

Antoniya Parvanova MEP welcomed participants¹ to this first constituent meeting, and reminded participants of the aims of the Group, i.e. to advocate the development of sound EU policies which contribute to prevention of mental health problems and ensure good services, care and empowerment for those affected by mental health problems.

She underlined the Group's 'open' nature and its intention to work closely with mental health stakeholders to ensure the relevance of its activities. She also stressed the apparent need for the Group, given the number of ongoing policy files that have a bearing on (but often do not explicitly take account of) mental health, as demonstrated by the policy brief that was circulated to MEPs. Some examples: the EU Mental Health Pact and the EU Presidencies, health inequalities, the pharmaceutical package, the Open Method of Coordination (health and long term care) and Europe 2020. Other themes and topics for meetings could be the link between physical and mental health and stigma.

Governance and working methods

This part of the meeting aimed to agree the Co-Chairs, themes/topics for this year's meetings, number of meetings and GAMIAN-Europe providing the secretariat for the Group's activities. Until now, three MEPs have indicated their interest in Co-chairing the Group, i.e. MEPs Antoniya Parvanova, Glenys Willmott and Nessa Childers, and their appointment was approved.

Antoniya Parvanova MEP also proposed to have a maximum number of 3 meetings a year, with the possibility of extra meetings when relevant developments occur.

It was agreed that GAMIAN-Europe would provide the secretariat for the Interest Group.

Dolores Gauci (President of GAMIAN-Europe²) underlined that there is a need for mental health issues to be pushed higher up the EU policy agenda. There is progress, but more work is needed to ensure that patients have a voice in the policies that affect them. This is the main role of GAMIAN-Europe, which aims to increase advocacy, cooperation, partnership and build patient capacity. This is why the organisation is happy to provide the secretariat of the Interest Group as this will play a crucial role in maintaining mental health as an EU policy priority. Dolores thanked the Co-Chairs for their commitment and support, and endorsed stigma and the link between physical and mental health as interesting themes for the Group's future work.

EU Priorities in the area of Mental Health

Joanna Darmanin (Head of Health Commissioner John Dalli's Cabinet) provided an overview of the Commission's plans and priorities in the area of mental health. She underlined the Commission's recognition of the important challenges posed by mental illness for the EU, and welcomed the creation of the Interest Group, as this will support the Commission in its activities and policy development.

¹ See annex for participants listing

² Global Alliance of Mental Illness Advocacy Networks-Europe

Joanna outlined the progress to date on the implementation of the Mental Health Pact. Successful conferences were held on two of the Pact's 5 themes (youth and depression). The other three themes (older people, workplace and stigma) will be the subject of conferences in the short term (with the event on older people rescheduled for 28 and 29 June). The aim of these conferences is to bring together the key stakeholders and to have an exchange of views and experiences on various aspects of the themes under discussion. A 'Compass on Mental Health and Well-being' was launched as part of the Pact and currently contains some 100 good practice examples.

Next year, during the Hungarian EU presidency, the Pact, its implementation and its outcome will be reviewed and evaluated, to bring together the lessons learnt and to determine steps for future activities. The Interest Group was invited to contribute to this evaluation.

In conclusion, Joanna welcomed the broader policy approach the Group is intending to take, and its potential for future political input in and support for Commission initiatives in the mental health domain.

John Bowis (former MEP) congratulated Antoniya Parvanova MEP on this initiative, as the Interest Group will play a significant role in ensuring a place for mental health issues on the EU policy agenda.

John provided some background information on how mental health has slowly made its way up the EU policy agenda. Various Presidencies (e.g. the Finnish presidency in 1999) have put mental health issues on their agendas, which has helped to slowly build policy attention for the topic – resulting in the Green Paper on mental health in 2004. The support of the European Parliament for this initiative was overwhelming. This Paper has led to the Mental Health Pact, which was launched in 2008. John underlined that action should not stop there: when the Pact is being reviewed next year, it should lead to concrete follow up activities; eventually, legislation will be needed.

Many member states lag behind in relation to prevention, promotion and care. But with 1 in every 4 citizens needing treatment for a mental health problem at some stage in their life, developing human, dignified and respectful care across the board is imperative.

John also referred to the negative effects of the current economic downturn on mental health. The need for mental health care increases in times of economic crisis, and despite great pressure on health budgets, now is not the time to cut spending on mental health. The statistics on mental health are telling; the problems are enormous. Solutions need to be found. Apart from the mental health problems themselves, stigma adds another damaging dimension.

John underlined the importance of a cross-policy approach, also at Commission level: apart from health policy, research, social and employment, education and development policies are important as well. In other words, health should be an integral dimension of all other policies.

Open discussion

The discussion was chaired by newly appointed Co-Chair **Nessa Childers MEP**, who started out by expressing her commitment to the work in the Group and underlining its importance. The discussion focused on potential themes for the Interest Group's future work. Several themes were suggested:

The broad dimension of the mental health:

Given the many different aspects and impacts of mental ill health, 'health in all policies' would seem the only sensible approach. It would be important therefore to forge links with the other DG's as well, also because there is a lot of work going on in this area already which is often not really visible. For instance, DG Development is putting a greater emphasis on mental health promotion in its new EU Development Strategy.

Stigma:

Society on the whole stigmatises those affected by mental health problems. This needs to be changed as a matter of urgency and one way forward would be to ensure that patients have a meaningful way to present and advocate their issues. Mental health does not have the same 'prestigious' status as – for example – cancer and this needs to be changed. We need to encourage for the voice of patients to be heard. Patient

organisations and links with grass root organisations are very important to the Commission as well.

Link between physical and mental health:

It was remarked that advocacy on physical health is quite well developed; patient groups seem to be active for a vast range of disease areas. Mental health seems to be underrepresented in this respect. Addressing mental health is incredibly important for our future, and should be an integral part of the health as well as the wider policy agenda.

It would be interesting to explore to what extent the link between physical and mental health could become part of the various existing Commission platforms (e.g. the XX).

The meeting was informed of a Charter on the link between physical and mental health, based on a review of qualitative and quantitative aspects, which was launched last October. Discussions are continuing on the Charter and its implementation, and this work might be relevant for the Group's future discussions.

The need for positive messaging:

It was also underlined that it would be useful to send positive messages to patients. Very often, mental health problems are viewed as insolvable. However, it is a fact that many people recover. Persons who have found their way out of their mental health problem often do not want to talk about it afterwards. This is a shame, because it would be highly relevant to underline the possible solutions. We have to think in terms of promoting mental health and think about mental health as a positive issue. Recovery could be a useful topic for the Group's future work.

Demography and ageing:

Another important aspect would be to address older people and mental health. The 'demographic crisis' and the increasing number of older people are posing specific problems, not only in terms of Alzheimer's Disease, but also in relation to other mental health problems and the social and health services required to support older people. The economic crisis is affecting young people and is (hopefully) shorter; the demographic crisis however is here to stay and will affect many older people. This could be the topic of an Interest Group seminar.

Resilience:

The concept of a 'healthy resilient society' was also mentioned as an important theme in the discussion. Helping individuals to be more resilient would prevent mental health problems.

Close

Closing the discussion, **Nessa Childers MEP** invited further suggestions towards the Interest Group's work programme. **Antoniya Parvanova MEP** thanked speakers, participants and secretariat and announced that a second meeting would probably be organised before the summer.

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Participants

Speakers

1. Antoniya Parvanova MEP
 2. Nessa Childers MEP
 3. Joanna Darmanin
 4. Dolores Gauci
 5. John Bowis
- European Commission DG SANCO
GAMIAN-Europe
GAMIAN Europe

MEPs

6. Antonio Bisignano
 7. Aioan O'Sullivan
 8. Jan Moens
 9. Razvan Hoinaru
 10. Stefan Mona
 11. Assistant
 12. Etienne Maury
- Assistant to Patrizia Toia MEP
Assistant to Nessa Childers MEP
Assistant to Said El Khadraoui EP
Assistant to Oana Antonescu MEP
Assistant to Cristian Busoi MEP
Assistant to Roberta Angelili MEP
Assistant to Antoniya Parvanova MEP

Stakeholders:

13. Rebecca Muller
 14. Paul Arteel
 15. Jurate Svarcaite
 16. Dorota Sienkiewicz
 17. Monika Danuta Kosinska
 18. Jennifer Shum
 19. Elisabeth Jelfs
 20. Aurélie Baranger
 21. Celine van Doosselaere
 22. Jean Louis Roux
 23. Annette Dumas
 24. Julie Schroeder
 25. Silvio Grieco
 26. Pascal Garel
 27. Juergen Schefflein
 28. Christine Marking
 29. Tadeusz Hawrot
 30. Sofia Marcia
 31. Camilla Hansen
 32. Patrizia Tosetti
 33. Linda Weisert
 34. Isabel Poli
- GAMIAN-Europe
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EHMA
Autism-Europe aisbl
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GAMIAN-Europe/Marking Public Affairs
European Brain Council
Burston Marsteller
Johnson & Johnson
European Commission DG Research
Hill & Knowlton
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