

To the attention of:

The Minister of Health of Spain
Dr José Manuel Miñones Conde

26th of July 2023

Spanish Presidency – mental health on the agenda of the Informal Ministerial Meeting EPSCO (HEALTH), 28 July 2023

Dear Dr José Manuel Miñones Conde,

We are writing to you in the framework of the forthcoming Informal Ministerial Meeting EPSCO (Health) on 28 July 2023 and one of the working sessions as per the [agenda](#) that will be dedicated to “Improving mental health in the EU”.

We look forward to this meeting particularly since the European Commission has recently come forward with its Communication entitled ‘A comprehensive approach to mental health’ which was released on June 7th 2023.

The undersigned organisations welcome this initiative, signifying a return to explicit EU-level attention and commitment to mental health. In Europe, one in four people is affected by mental health issues. According to the OECD 2022 ‘Health at A Glance’ Report, some 50% reported unmet needs for mental healthcare in 2022 although it is commonly known that effective ways of early intervention exist. Whilst current research, innovation, regulatory, and funding systems are artificially siloed, mental health requires a holistic and inclusive approach since it encompasses emotional, behavioral, and cognitive strengths across the life span.

Compromised brain health greatly increases the risk of mental disorders across the life span (e.g., depression, anxiety, substance misuse, dementias, and neurocognitive disorders) and hinders the achievement of each individual's full human potential.

Furthermore, by means of its proposed 9 key themes, the Communication provides an overview of the many mental health-related areas where progress is still required and where the Commission is planning to take action. However, we feel that this initiative could be taken one step further to ensure that it will trigger action and change on the ground.

We therefore would like you - in the context of your current Presidency of the EU - to consider the following:

*Building on the Commission Communication 'A comprehensive approach to mental health', and to ensure this approach resonates at national level and leads to concrete action and progress, we ask the Council to call on the Commission to come forward with a proposal for Member States to put in place **national action programmes** on mental health and well-being. These action plans should strive to address the full range of mental (ill) health related priorities, i.e. prevention of mental ill health, mental health promotion, treatment, care and cure, and should be coordinated at EU level.*

Such an initiative would not only be in line with the Communication but also add considerable value and consistency to the current endeavours.

In addition, there are precedents for such a request: the 2013 Council Conclusions invite Member States to 'make mental health and well-being a priority of their health policies and to develop strategies and/or action plans on mental health' which should prioritize surveillance registry, mental health promotion and prevention, improve access to care and treatment, address continuity of care along the care pathway, improve mental health in the workplace, and focus on youth and supporting families.



Furthermore, the Commission has – successfully - called for and coordinated the establishment of national action programmes before, notably in the areas of rare disorders and cancer. Both these areas have greatly benefitted from this EU-level initiative, resulting in better -and comparable- data collection and concrete actions. There are also models for the coordination and stimulation of these action programmes, such as EUROPLAN.

What should these national action programmes address?

Spain's specific Mental Health Strategy could serve as a useful example, acting as a framework for the development of different actions and priority themes. Other models could be considered, such as the 2016 EU Framework for Action on Mental Health and Wellbeing which was developed, agreed and endorsed by multiple relevant stakeholders, including a number of Member States. In addition, we would be in favor of the establishment of an EU Policy Lab for mental health and youth – recently presented at a European Parliament public hearing on EU action on mental health and warmly welcomed by MEPs present.

We, as organizations representing the main stakeholders involved with mental health - health professionals, patients, carers, scientists - would be willing to propose to the Commission the development of a structured action plan to assess the gaps, a surveillance system (registry) to address the lack of data, a strong research component to boost brain research and a similar mechanism as set up for EUROPLAN to accompany member states to deliver at national level. In this framework, we also would like to highlight the importance to support to this end the use of all available tools in our hands including animal models.

As Spain has put mental health forward as one of its Presidency's health priorities, we hope that this proposal will be welcomed.



We look forward to the Council to be supportive of novel ideas that would provide for the framework for collaboration, involving all relevant players in order to collectively shape the required answers to this major societal challenge.

We thank you in advance for your attention and interest and look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Suzanne Dickson
President
European Brain Council



Professor Geert Dom
President
European Psychiatry Association



Péter Kéri
President
GAMIAN Europe



Professor Irene Tracey
President
Federation of European
Neurosciences Societies



John Saunders
Executive Director
EUFAMI



Professor Christoph Steinebach
President
EFPA

On behalf of the European Brain Council and its member organisations:

