

“Promotion of Mental Health and Well being in Older People – making it happen”: a European Union thematic conference

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The conference “Promotion of Mental health and Well being in Older People – making it happen” (Madrid, 28-29 June 2010) was co-organized by the European Commission’s Directorate for Health and Consumers and the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs of Spain together with the support of the Presidency of Spain of the European Union. This report is drafted from the conclusions of the conference which were distributed to the participants at the end.

The organizers invited 182 representatives from 29 European countries, along with representatives from the European Commission and the European Parliament, including members of health and social authorities and governmental and non-governmental organizations of professionals and consumers. The conference offered several opportunities to contribute to the debate on how to promote mental health in older age through plenary sessions (promoting mental health and providing good care for older people; policies on mental health and older people; conclusions from the conference and actions to be taken), parallel sessions (mental health promotion in old age: healthy ageing and well being; older people in vulnerable situations; prevention of mental disorders; care and treatment systems; informal carers) and discussions.

The EU population is ageing fast: in 2050 about 30% of the EU population will be over 65 years of age and 11% more than 80 years. Mental health problems are prevalent in old age causing significant suffering for individuals, families and communities. Unfortunately, it is recognized that Europe’s societies and its health and social workforce is not well enough prepared to supply the mental health needs of the older population. The conference underlined the right of older Europeans to the highest level of health and well being. It was stressed that it is everyone’s duty to give greater priority to promoting mental health and well being and to tackle mental health problems.

Several horizontal themes were identified which need to be considered to develop actions to improve the mental health and the well being of older people. Certain principles were also considered.

The following five priority fields and key actions were debated and identified:

- Mental health promotion in old age: healthy ageing and well being
- Prevention of mental disorders and promotion of autonomy
- Older people in vulnerable situations
- Health systems for care and treatment
- Supporting the informal carers

The organizers were invited to communicate the outcome to the Presidency at the conference on “Active and healthy ageing”, and encouraged action for the promotion of mental health and well being of older people.

The European Commission and the Member States, together with regional and local authorities, and in partnership with professionals, patients and informal carers, NGOs and older people themselves, through health and other relevant sectors, were invited to develop several initiatives to assure the best possible mental health and well being for older persons in Europe.

The conference was clearly a success with much positive feedback from participants, who recognized that they have learned a lot from the presentations, the reports from sessions and the discussions in the plenary sessions, which will provide very useful input in their future work.

The contracted colleagues from the IMPACT-consortium will prepare the conference report, which will include brief summaries of all presentations and discussions. They will publish the conference presentations on the mental health pages of DG SANCO's website, as was done for the preceding thematic conferences under the Pact:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/mental_health/policy/conferences/index_en.htm