

## Mental health – a political and social priority

It is now 15 years since the adoption of the National Mental Health Programme of the Slovak Republic (further referred to only as NMHP SR). There are, however, still persisting unresolved problems in the area of mental health having impact on the whole population, because we cannot be healthy without having a good mental health.

The challenges we are facing encompass especially the lack of all sorts of community services – social, health, educational or leisure time ones. There is fragmentation and weak, if any linkages among health and social care, system of education, legal aspects or culture engagement. There is absence of awareness and education of wide public about mental, there is not systematic approach to housing and employment of persons with disabilities. As a result, they are excluded from the society and placed in socially and economically ineffective institutional care, or unnecessarily kept in hospitals. According to WHO, there is enough evidence that investments into mental health are paid back at least in their volume.

On the occasion of the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NMHP SR an international conference Mental and meaningful life was organized in Bratislava, Slovakia, from 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> September 2019 under the auspices of Minister of Health Andrea Kalavská, of Chairwoman of the European Parliament Committee for employment and social affairs Lucia Ďuriš Nicholsonová, and Mayor of Bratislava Matúš Vallo. Its main objective was mobilizing professional and lay public, politicians and executive bodies at all levels to be more interested in promoting and investing in mental health. The conference also created space for presentation of work of organizations supporting persons with mental health disorders and their relatives.

The conference audience was unique consisting of representatives from various institutions playing important role in mental health – patients and recipients of health and social services, their relatives, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, psychologists, social workers, pedagogues, primary prevention workers, representatives of NGOs, academia, social services providers, self-governing bodies, Ministry of Health, Slovak Psychiatric Society, Commissioner for persons with Disabilities and guest speakers from abroad – World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, World Psychiatric Association (WPA), Mental Health Europe, Czech Psychiatric Society and others.

### **Participants of the conference have concluded:**

- **We want to keep the Slovak citizens healthy as long as possible**, therefore in the field of mental health promotion and development it is necessary:
  - To increase and to ensure enough information about mental health for the Slovak citizens from their early childhood to elderly (this includes also elimination of prejudices and stigmatization);
  - To develop existing programmes and projects on mental health promotion and prevention of mental disorders on national and subnational levels for all age groups - lifelong starting from kindergartens and elementary schools (e.g. healthy schools, healthy workplace, healthy cities, dementia friendly communities, Zippy's friends, Crazy? -And what! etc.);

- To make the work of Health Counselling Centres in public health institutes more effective and broader in the field of mental health;
- To create a system and conditions for quality data collection and analysis in the field of mental health that are important to implement inevitable reforms.
- **We need to increase quality and effectiveness of care of persons with mental disorders,** therefore it is necessary in the mental health secondary prevention:
  - To ensure human and legally correct approach in all phases of care;
  - To improve conditions for access and provision of integrated health and social services for persons with mental disorders. These services must be patient-tailored, multidisciplinary and complex;
  - To ensure availability and quality of pedopsychiatric, psychiatric, psychotherapeutic and psychologic care;
  - To improve care for mental health in the primary health care (general practitioners) and strengthen their collaboration with mental health services (including assessment physicians)
- We need to ensure and a good quality and effectiveness of long-term and community care for mental health in the tertiary prevention aimed at:
  - Creation a system of a quality and effective integrated long-term care (including creation of multidisciplinary teams and community and home services);
  - Participatory engagement of service users in the whole decision-making processes that affect them (including the so-called supportive decision-making);
  - Collaboration and networking of relevant stakeholders in the area of human rights, social support and services, health care, activation and employment, education, culture, planning, financing and providing services and implementing activities on national, regional and local levels;
  - Transition from institutional to community care (development of wide range of new accessible community services and deinstitutionalization);
  - Ensuring quality and available counselling for patients, clients and family relatives using various forms (e-g- counselling points, user-friendly information in state and public administration, user-friendly information leaflets etc.).

In light of the above we demand that:

- The mental health is a real political and social priority in all sectors (including primary, secondary and tertiary prevention);
- The UN Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities is fully respected and implemented;
- The Council for Mental Health is transformed into a supra-sectorial advisory body to the Government of the Slovak republic and has representatives from all relevant sectors and stakeholders operating in mental health;
- The NMHP SR is re-drafted (including drafting Action Plan) that will be implemented on national and regional levels.

*Organizational Committee of the Conference has also acknowledged the Call for action of the of the non-governmental organizations **Let us improve mental health of Slovaks** and identifies itself with its content.*

*Main organizer of the conference:*

Association for Mental Health – Integra, civil society

*Co-organizers of the conference:*

WHO Country Office in Slovakia, World Psychiatric Association (WPA), Slovak Psychiatric Society, Czech Psychiatric Society, SOCIA – Foundation for support of social changes, Mental Health Europe

*Partners of the conference:*

Council for counselling in social work, League for mental health, Irrsining Menschlich e.V., Fokus Praha.

*If you agree with this document and want to support its content,  
please, let us know at [info@mhbratislava.sk](mailto:info@mhbratislava.sk)*