

European Community based Mental health Service Providers (EuCoMS) Network

Values, ambitions, actions and participation

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The European network for community based mental health service providers

Community mental health services are the key to improving mental health systems in Europe. An integrated network of good quality mental health services embedded in the community is associated with better service utilisation outcomes (better access to services, less coercive measures and human rights violations), better client outcomes (increased quality of life, increased treatment adherence), and better social outcomes (less social stigma, housing stability, vocational rehabilitation).

There is overwhelming evidence supporting deinstitutionalisation and a shift towards community mental health care. Since 2005¹, political support for this transition is steadily increasing. However, for people with severe and enduring mental ill health, services are still mainly provided in a hospital settings in many European countries. In developing countries, a staggering proportion of 35.5-50.3% of persons with severe mental health problems do not have any alternative but a complete lack of care or support all. In general, quality community based mental health services are often only partially implemented or in full by only a few organisations. Barriers for the reforms are insufficient political commitment and allocated resources for implementation. Implementation of the reforms is further complicated by the variety of mental health systems in Europe and the absence of a clear guideline on how to implement a new service delivery model that fits the national context.

Concerted effort is necessary to create the crucial link between policy and practice to support the implementation of quality community based mental health improving the wellbeing of people with severe mental illness in Europe. For that reason, 19 organisations from 11 European countries established the European Community Mental health Services (EuCoMS) Network in April 2016. The partners in EuCoMS agree on the need for good quality community mental health services in Europe, backed up by evidence of the value for people using these services. To make a difference with and for people who experience severe and enduring mental ill health, EuCoMS partners want to work together to continuously improve their own service delivery and advocate for strengthening mental health systems in such a way that funding mechanisms, legislation and policies create an enabling environment for community mental health services to function. To achieve its goals, EuCoMS will cooperate closely with other European and national organisations of clients, families, carers, professionals and related (social) services.

Shared values of EuCoMS

All partners in EuCoMS share the following set of values and principles and will act in line with them:

- Services are based upon the goals and strengths of the individual using them. They support self-determination, recovery and individualized care, regardless of symptoms and vulnerabilities of people. Services should support the individual in leading a meaningful life in their community.

¹ European policy initiatives such as WHO's European Mental Health Action Plan 2013 – 2020 (2013) <http://www.euro.who.int/en/publications/abstracts/european-mental-health-action-plan-20132020-the>, the EU Joint Action for Mental Health and Well-being (2013 - 2015) <http://www.mentalhealthandwellbeing.eu/the-joint-action>, and the EU-Compass for Action on Mental Health and Well-being (2015-2018) http://ec.europa.eu/health/mental_health/eu_compass/index_en.html

- People experiencing mental ill health as well as their families and carers are actively involved as co-creators of planning, development and provision of services. Service users, carers and professionals are all experts in recovery in their own right and reach decisions together.
- Services respect and protect the (human) rights of people with mental ill health
- Services actively fight stigma associated with mental ill health within the mental health services and in the rest of society.
- Services use the least restrictive environment possible. Hospitalisation is only an option of last resort when all community treatment alternatives have been exhausted.
- Hospital and community mental health teams work closely together with a shared vision on community mental health services provide mental and physical health care, employment, education and accommodation of good quality. They strive to hire only competent workers (including peer experts) who aspire to work according to the state of the art evidence based practices in mental health.
- Services are accessible and facilitate continuity of care in local networks.
- Services report publicly about the methods they use and results they achieve.

Shared ambitions among EuCoMS partners

The scope of the network is community based mental health services for prevention, treatment and recovery of people experiencing severe and enduring mental ill health. This does not exclude organisations and networks that additionally provide services to other vulnerable groups in the community. EuCoMS partners strive to achieve the following goals:

- A set of criteria to define community based mental health care;
- An assessment of the needs of different kinds of communities and individuals;
- An assessment of community mental health services needed to address those needs;
- Appropriate European, national, regional and local legislation, policies and funding to meet those needs;
- A support structure for services that want to develop or improve community based services;
- A strong peer leadership of (ex) users, family and carers in services.

EuCoMS network activities

To achieve these goals, over the next few years EuCoMS will carry out the following activities.

1. Defining community based mental health care

- Agreement on fundamental principles of community based mental health care
- Agreement on a methodology to assess the needs for community-based mental health services within a population
- Agreement on services (including not only treatment/support, also housing, work etc..) and service levels to address the needs of these communities
- Agreement on indicators to evaluate services. Are the individual needs (clinical outcomes, life expectancy, quality of life) and community needs (e.g. indicators on school dropout, work, income, safety, costs of somatic health care) met?

2. Supporting and pursuing the full implementation of community based mental health care in nations and regions

- Act as the European voice of community mental health services and:

- Advise the European Commission and Member States and other European countries on the implementation of community based mental health services.
- Advise the European Commission and Member States and other European countries to always assess the impact of legislation and policies on accessible, affordable mental health care of good quality
- Advocate for a universal right to access community-based mental health care in the European Union and other European countries
- Strengthen national networks of community based services and support these networks:
 - Influencing national stakeholders, legislation and policies;
 - charting the state of community mental health services inclusion in their country or region and identify the gap between the desired and specific situation;
- Support participants in their advocacy by collecting and sharing data and information:
 - Publishing factsheets / infographics about community mental health services in countries and regions.
 - Comparing systematically the performance of mental health systems and services.

3. Organising exchanges of knowledge and experiences on mental health systems and the development and implementation of community mental health services

- Mental health legislation, funding mechanisms, leadership, governance and public affairs
- Service models, workforce development, best practices, service monitoring
- Innovative practices and research findings, implementation strategies
- Support of people with complex needs (mental ill health, addictions, homeless)
- Collaborate with partners from education, work and income, justice, housing etc.

4. Supporting existing mental health services to further develop and advance community based services

- Provide guidance to network participants for a transformational shift in culture and practice in mental health services
- Explore the impact of the system transformation on service delivery and share this with network participants
- Organise training programs on site and on demand to increase capabilities
- Organise an exchange program between different organisations in the network
- Provide a digital repository on service delivery and organisation
- Organise shadow visits (as a side event to network meetings)
- Facilitate “country raids”, where a delegation from different countries assess on demand specific services or a system in a short visit and report the findings

5. Setting up a program to strengthen peer leadership of (former) service users, family and carers.

- Develop a repository of good practices and implementation strategies for peer expertise
- Develop peer-to-peer training programs to strengthen peer expert leadership
- Develop training programs for services to unlock the potential of peer experts

Inclusive and representative: who is involved in EuCoMS

The variety in the national mental health systems in European countries is huge. Services may be owned and governed by national, regional or local authorities. They may be private for-profit or not-for profit

organisations within a competitive framework. They may exclusively cater services to people with mental ill health, or they may also include services geared towards people with other health conditions or needs, such as dementia care or care for people with intellectual disabilities.

EuCoMS primarily represents European community based mental health service providers. The network is open for networks, umbrella organisations, service providers, governmental agencies, health authorities, health trusts and individuals that provide services for people experiencing severe and enduring mental ill health. Only organisations and individuals sharing the aforementioned shared values are welcome. There will be no barrier to initial participation, however organisations and networks will be expected to demonstrate their journey towards community mental health services and the network's criteria.

Involvement of peer experts in service design and delivery is a core component of community mental health care. Peer experts are expected to increasingly take up leading roles within mental health services. Participants in the network will actively contribute to this development and work towards a full participation of peer experts in service delivery, policies and management and also representation in this network.