

# Workplace Mental Health as a Major Issue of Public Health Agenda and the Role of European Networks

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**A saúde mental no local de trabalho como uma questão importante na agenda da saúde pública e o papel das redes europeias**

The European Network for Workplace Health Promotion (ENWHP) and the European Network for Mental Health Promotion (ENMHP) are two major references for those interested in building up healthy and sustainable work environments in Europe and beyond: policy makers, practitioners, professionals, researchers, educators, employers, employees, and other stakeholders.

ENWHP is an informal network of national occupational health and safety institutes, public health, health promotion, and statutory social insurance institutions, with BKK (the German ENWHP member) playing the role of secretariat until 2015.

These two European Networks also offer important website tools and resources.

With the support of the European Commission, DG Health and Consumer Protection, the ENWHP, established in 1996, has carried out a number of innovative and seminal European initiatives, from 1997 until now, consolidating workplace health promotion (WHP) as a strong field of research and action for public health at the European and national level.

Some of those initiatives are also relevant for mental health promotion (e.g., *Move Europe: Healthy Lifestyles in the Working Environment* [2007/09]; *Work in Tune with Life* [2009/10]; PH Work: *Promoting Healthy Work for People with Chronic Illness* [2011/13]).

A historical conceptual document on WHP was the Luxembourg Declaration (adopted in 1997, updated in 2005 and 2007). The members of the network agreed on a common understanding of the WHP concept: “Workplace Health Promotion (WHP) is the combined efforts of employers, employees and society to improve the health and well-being of people at work” with this expected outcome to be achieved through a triple combination of actions: (i) improving work organization and other working conditions, (ii) promoting active participation, and (iii) encouraging personal development.

“Healthy employees in healthy organizations” in a knowledge-driven economy is now an economic, social, and political goal to achieve, not a utopian post-tayloristic dream or an ideological slogan. WHP is part of overall corporate health management, including mandatory occupational and safety services. Some of the key priorities defined 20 years ago are ongoing: (i) increased awareness of WHP and promotion of the responsibility for health with regard to all institutional and noninstitutional stakeholders, (ii) identification and dissemination of models of

good practice, and (iii) development of guidelines for effective WHP.

On the ENWHP website, a rich toolbox is available, containing more than 400 effective WHP programs, methods (e.g., case studies, models of good practice), and instruments (e.g., questionnaires, guidelines, informational and educational material) that have been used in practical contexts in all European countries.

Mental health, wellbeing, stress prevention and coping, psychosocial determinants of health at work, absenteeism, young people, women, ageing, early retirement, and health are now major issues for the public health agenda.

Another network in this field, more recent but also very active, is the European Network for Mental Health Promotion (ENMHP) established in 2013, as a result of the ProMenPol project (2007/09), also funded by the European Commission.

ENMHP aims are (i) to influence practitioners, policy makers, professionals, and administrators and (ii) to become the premier network for mental health promotion (MHP). Membership is free.

According to the ENMHP website, ProMenPol goals are to support the practices and policies of mental health promotion in three settings: schools, workplaces, and older people's residences. It offers important resources, available online (e.g., MindHealth, an eLearning programme on MHP in three settings: schools, workplaces, and older people's residences).

ProMenPol produced the following services and outputs: (i) a Tools Database, (ii) Field Trials, and (iii) the ProMenPol Toolkit.

Richard Wynne, project manager (Work Research Centre, Dublin, Ireland, partner of ENMHP), presented at the Lisbon conference the *Workplace MHP Handbook* (168 pp.), divided into 3 sections: Basics in Mental Health

Promotion; Topics, Methods and Tools for MHP in the Workplace; Practical Exercises.

A short version of the *Workplace MHP Handbook* is now available in English, in German, and in Finnish. The MHP-Hands are intended to have either a "self-directed usage" (stakeholders from within or outside of the setting access the handbooks and self-educate themselves using the resources available on the website) or a "directed usage": Mental health professionals with a relationship to the settings promote and train people in the usage of the manuals.

There is a growing interest in and concern about the burden of ill-health mental health, especially in the workplace but also in schools and other settings. For example, "Healthy work environments, active health and disease prevention at workplace" was the title of the conference held at the Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, Portugal, June 8–9, 2017, organized by the European Commission.

Additionally, on May 27, 2013, the World Health Assembly adopted the Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020. And on October 10, Mental Health in the Workplace was the theme of World Mental Health Day 2017.

Good or bad mental health is more and more a function of the settings in which we live, study, and work. The problem of knowledge transfer and access to validate tools and methods to promote mental health in workplaces (but also in schools and institutional residences) is now better addressed by our public health agenda, and we have more and more online resources to cope with the problems, challenges, and opportunities in this field. Finally, though equally importantly, we know now that mental health is also more than the mere absence of mental illness.

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