

“Sustainability, Health Policy and Legislation: Community Mental Health Care” workshop successfully took place in Utrecht the Netherlands, 28th-29th February, 2024.



The first thematic workshop for sustainability- intended for country teams of JA ImpleMENTAL adapting the Belgian Mental Health Reform, Member State Policy Committee (MSPC) delegates & stakeholder forum members- was organized by Trimbos Institute and WHO-Europe, between 28th-29th February, 2024 in Utrecht.

The hybrid workshop that was attended by almost a total of 100 people either onsite and online aimed to foster and to facilitate network development, with a focus on mental health system improvement, and wished to provide a platform to emphasise why mental health transformations are important now, and share a common thinking on how these transformations can materialise short and long-term in the future.

The event had two major themes:

- Core Principles of Community-Based Care: Sustaining the Recovery Approach and Intersectoral Collaboration
- Workshop on: WHO-Europe Guidance on mental health policies and legislation.

The first day of the workshop was kicked off by guest speakers Bernard Jacob and José Miguel Caldas de Almeida (both part of the work package 5 advisory group) to discuss how sustainability could be conceptualised for community mental health and what it should entail, and what can be learnt from past experiences.

Bernard Jacob touched upon establishing intersectoral collaboration with justice and education, and presented innovative funding models which support networks rather than services. He underlined that international collaboration was essential for sustaining community mental health care systems.

José Miguel Caldas de Almeida further enriched this by going into the facilitators and barriers of sustaining a community mental health reform. His recommendations included among others: building consensus among stakeholders, supporting user and family participation, research capacity for evidence-based reform, leadership skills at various levels, and capacity-building extended to ministries of health for effective policy implementation. Using these insights participants tried to detangle the concept of sustainability in the framework of JA ImpleMENTAL among the project partners implementing the Belgian Mental Health Reform, including:

- Financial and Structural Sustainability
- Collaborative and Integrated Services
- User-Centred and Accessible Care
- Long-Term Commitment and Holistic Approach
- Patient-Centred and Timely Accessible Service

Raluca Nica and René Keet, gave insights into policy engagement strategies and how a fidelity scale for community mental health (using F-ACT as a lead example) can be very beneficial, if not essential, for sustainability purposes. The above topics were discussed in smaller groups to find out applied practices of different countries and to identify what we can learn from each other. (For example, in Spain, bottom-up approaches are seen to be very beneficial in policy engagement strategies, while in Greece top-down approaches have been very beneficial in policy engagement.) With regards to fidelity, a reflexive approach should be taken that allows us to apply original principles, while also being able to react to our context and learnings along the way.

The first day was closed by colleagues from Semmelweis University who presented a fictional case study on how and why a policy dialogues could be organised. They emphasised the importance of policy dialogues as a tool for sustainability of community mental health endeavours. Participants mapped up who should be and could be invited to such a forum and which topics and specific aims of a policy dialogue should be discussed in given participating countries. A guidance for policy dialogues will be elaborated and available in JA ImpleMENTAL very soon.

The second day of the event gave the possibility to deep dive into the WHO guidance on mental health policy and strategic action plans, which are currently under development. The guidance presented at the workshop aims to integrate the human-rights based approach and social and structural determinants.

A snippet of the discussed areas and directives were mental health sector contributions to structural & social determinants & society wide issues impacting mental health and well-being; person- centred, recovery oriented and rights-based assessment, interventions & support; Service organisation and development; leadership, governance, and other enablers. This guidance has a checklist to help countries to assess if their legislation to be aligned with WHO's approach. Several inputs gathered from workshop participants will be incorporated to support WHO in further developing its guide.

The second they concluded on an inspiring field visit to Enik Recovery College, providing participants with practical insights into a 100% peer-led recovery college. Ton Verspoor and Martijn Kole presented the operation of the college stressing: “We try to protect space to grow without exclusion and separation, and everyone is welcome” -They explained and shared details of how they got the municipality to finance Enik Recovery College, highlighting the new style of support and training they offer.

About JA Implemental:

The Joint Action involves 39 participating organisations from competent authorities in 21 EU/EEA countries and supports them to establish local networks for mental health and to strengthen community-based provision of preventive care services across sectors in order to improve access to a sustainable quality of care. JA ImpleMENTAL is focusing on the transfer and implementation of two best practices:

(1) mental health reform in Belgium based on the principle of deinstitutionalization, the transition from primarily institutional care to community-based care in order to improve mental health outcomes and quality of life and avoid unnecessary hospitalizations, and

(2) Suicide Prevention Austria (SUPRA), a multi-level suicide prevention strategy that integrates universal, selective and indicated prevention interventions, based on the local implementation context and building upon existing resources and initiatives. The activities of the JA ImpleMENTAL strongly support the new Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health, which aims to put mental health on par with physical health and to ensure a cross-sectorial approach to mental health issues.

JA ImpleMENTAL is committed to improve the quality of life of people living with mental problems and illnesses with the involvement of all parties concerned.

For further information on JA ImpleMENTAL project: <https://ja-imental.eu/>

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