

## **The Ministry of the Interior and Health's response to the EU Commission's Call for Evidence regarding the initiative for a comprehensive approach to mental health**

The Danish Government welcomes the opportunity to comment on the European Commission's initiative for a comprehensive approach to mental health and gives thanks to the Commission for putting this important topic on the agenda.

The European Commission's initial objectives listed in the call for evidence align in overall terms with the Government of Denmark's priorities in the area of mental health. The Danish Government recognises the European Commission's outline of challenging factors such as war on the European continent as well as the COVID-19 pandemic and agrees that these serious events have further underlined the importance of mental health. Furthermore, the Danish Government sees positively that the initiative presented by the European Commission seeks to promote a comprehensive, prevention-oriented approach to mental health as a public health issue and to mainstream mental health into EU policies.

Mental health in Denmark is declining, and it is particularly worrying that an increasing number of children and young people experience poor mental health. This can potentially have serious consequences for e.g. their development, education and further life course. Among children and young people, approximately 15% will be diagnosed with a mental disorder before they turn 18. In addition, mental disorders are very common, and it is estimated that approximately 40-50% of the population will have a mental disorder in their lifetime.

It is a priority for the Danish Government that the combined efforts across sectors in the area must be lifted, both in relation to mental health in general and the efforts for people with mental disorders. The newly elected Danish Government has therefore chosen to prioritize an additional 3 billion DKK (approximately 400 million EUR) for efforts in the area. The further prioritization of funds is to be seen in the context of the broad political agreement on a 10-year plan for psychiatry and mental health, which was reached in September 2022. The agreement includes 19 ambitious objectives that cover a wide range of topics, including mental health, prevention, early efforts, and social psychiatry.

Priority action areas that must be addressed first are as follows:

1. Creating an easily accessible program in the municipalities for children and young people in mental distress and with symptoms of mental illness
2. Increased efforts for those with serious mental illnesses and a here-and-now capacity package for regional hospital psychiatry
3. Information and de-stigmatisation efforts
4. Strengthened interdisciplinary and evidence-based environments

#### 5. Improved framework for research on mental illness prevention and treatment

Finally, the Danish Government notes that there are several points of similarity between the prioritized action areas from the Danish agreement on a 10-year plan for psychiatry and mental health and the European Commission's possible future workstreams with a focus on, among other things, promotion of good mental health and prevention of mental health problems, early detection and screening of mental health problems, and advancing on key elements such as de-stigmatisation and rights.