

Public Mental Health services in the European region during the COVID-19 pandemic

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The European Public Health Association (EUPHA), in conjunction with the Mental Health Foundation UK, conducted a purposely designed online survey of public and mental health professionals from across Europe, exploring public mental health responses to the pandemic in different regions, nations and localities. Participants were recruited from EUPHAs mental health division and through snowballing. Four broad areas were explored, namely; (1) perceived changes in available mental health supports during the pandemic; (2) whether or not a public mental health response plan had been developed; (3) if any demographic groups or priority areas had been given particularly consideration in this response and (4) how the response had been developed (i.e. whether intersectoral approaches had been adopted and the perceived degree to which service users and carers had been included in its development). Forty-four survey responses from twenty different European nations were collected and grouped according to whether respondents were practising in countries with low, medium or high COVID-19 incidence rates. The majority of responses were from public health professionals with over 20 years of experience. Results indicated wide variations in policy responses to the crisis and in the way mental health services have adapted to date. However, in the majority of countries surveyed, while an increase in online mental health supports during the pandemic was reported, no change in long term funding for mental health supports was observed. In addition, in the majority of countries, several vulnerable groups were rarely given specific attention in policy responses, namely low-income families, people with long-term health conditions or disabilities and ethnic minorities. In this workshop we will discuss the findings from this survey and explore what insights might be learned from experiences across Europe to date.