

EUROPEAN MENTAL HEALTH CITIES NETWORK (EMHCN)

CHARTER OF PRINCIPLES

PREAMBLE

Mental health is an essential public good and a fundamental human right, recognised as a key determinant of quality of life, social cohesion and the sustainable development of communities. In the current European context — marked by profound and multifaceted transformations (social, economic, environmental, technological and demographic) — it is urgent to strengthen local public policies that integrate mental health promotion across the life cycle in an intersectoral manner. Cities and municipalities, as territorial units of proximity governance, are strategic actors in creating healthy urban ecosystems and promoting the psychological well-being of populations.

In this context, the signatories of this Charter of Principles establish the **European Mental Health Cities Network (EMHCN)**, a vehicle for municipal cooperation aimed at innovation, equity and sustainability in the field of mental health.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Promoting Mental Health as a Local Strategic Priority

- Integrate mental health as a core pillar of municipal policies across domains such as health, education, housing, urban planning, environment, social action, culture and employment.
- Contribute to the prevention of psychological suffering, the building of resilient communities and the reduction of mental health inequalities.

2. Knowledge Sharing and Dissemination of Good Practices

- Encourage structured and ongoing exchange of scientific evidence, innovative methodologies and local experiences among municipalities.
- Promote culturally sensitive, data-driven practices with proven impact on mental health improvement.

3. Development of Collaborative Projects

- Design, implement and evaluate transnational projects addressing shared challenges in promotion, prevention, early intervention, psychosocial rehabilitation and community inclusion.
- Promote intersectoral approaches based on implementation science and community participation.

4. Engagement with International Networks and Platforms

- Strengthen institutional links with relevant international organisations (e.g. WHO, EU, OECD, WFMH, UN).
- Act as a European interlocutor for the promotion of global mental health policies.

5. Technical Capacity Building and Sustainable Funding

- Promote the continuous upskilling of professionals and local stakeholders in mental health matters.
- Identify European and international funding opportunities (e.g. Horizon Europe, Erasmus+, EU4Health), encouraging joint applications and sustainable resource mobilisation models.

6. Participation and Democratic Representation

- Ensure that the planning and implementation of local mental health strategies are participatory, incorporating the voices of people with lived experience, carers, professionals, and decision-makers.
- Uphold the principles of gender equality, cultural diversity, and the inclusion of socially vulnerable groups.

7. Ethics, Human Rights, and Public Accountability

- Promote respect for and protection of the human rights of persons with mental health conditions, in alignment with international instruments (e.g. United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).
- Ensure high standards of public ethics, transparency, and accountability.

8. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Continuous Improvement

- Establish shared indicator systems, based on comparable data, to monitor the impact of local policies.
- Integrate evaluation outcomes in the definition of future priorities, within a continuous learning and innovation cycle.

NETWORK GOVERNANCE

1. Membership and Participation

- Only cities and municipalities located in European countries may be full members of EMHCN.
- Membership is voluntary and formalised through the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding and acceptance of this Charter.

- Members commit to implementing local policies aligned with the defined principles.

2. Advisory Council

- An Advisory Council will be formed with representatives from civil society, universities, research centres, professional organisations, social sector entities and citizens with lived experience.
- Members are appointed by the General Assembly based on merit, representativeness and diversity, through open calls or proposals from member cities or the Executive Secretariat.
- This body will provide strategic advice, scientific validation and impact assessment of network actions.

3. General Assembly

- The network's highest decision-making body, composed of official representatives of member cities and municipalities.
- Meets annually in person, and extraordinarily in digital format when necessary.

4. Executive Secretariat

- The network's operational body, responsible for institutional representation, project management, activity coordination and municipal support.
- Composed of three cities/municipalities elected at the General Assembly, serving two-year terms, renewable once.

5. Thematic Working Groups

- Technical groups will be established to address priority areas (e.g. child and adolescent mental health, ageing, mental health at work, migration, digital mental health).

- Open to participation from cities, municipalities and Advisory Council members.

6. Communication and Cooperation Mechanisms

- The network will develop interactive digital platforms to facilitate member communication, sharing of best practices, project management and public dissemination of results.

FINAL COMMITMENT

By signing this Charter of Principles, municipalities commit to:

- Develop integrated and equitable local public policies that promote mental health;
- Actively participate in the life of the Network, contributing to its collective mission;
- Uphold the values of human dignity, inclusion, scientific evidence, and European cooperation.

All omitted matters shall be decided by the General Assembly.