

All in one brain: a mental health discussion
Hosted by
MEP Stelios Kypouropoulos
European Parliament
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On the occasion of World Mental Health Day on October 10, 2023, MEP Dr. Kypouropoulos hosted in the European Parliament the conference entitled "*All in one brain: a discussion on mental health*", with the participation of the **Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, Ms Stella Kyriakides** and the **Deputy Minister of Health and psychiatrist Dr. Dimitris Vartzopoulos**.

Frédéric Destrebecq, Executive Director of the European Brain Council (EBC), moderated the discussion and participated in an active dialogue with the speakers.



In the first panel, the discussion focused on the [European Commission's Communication on Mental Health](#), published on 7 June 2023, and the [European Parliament's Report on Mental Health](#), where MEP Kypouropoulos is the shadow rapporteur for EPP.

Ms Kyriakides stressed the clear and firm commitment to tackle mental health challenges holistically. She continued by stating that the Commission's Communication on the Comprehensive Approach to Mental health, aims to go beyond public health policy, including other relevant areas such as prevention, access to care and treatment, while also addressing psychosocial aspects, stigma, and discrimination, with a focus on vulnerable groups. She analysed the 20 flagship initiatives of the Communication, with 1.23 billion euros in funding opportunities, and highlighted the need for more innovation in mental health care to fight neurological disorders.

Dr. Vartzopoulos, commented on the in-depth mental health reform that Greece has undergone over the last 25 years. He talked about the development of psychiatric clinics within hospitals, mental health centers in urban areas and mobile units in rural areas.

Moreover, he commented on the Greek government upcoming law that will restore mental health services, including the creation of dedicated mental health units within every regional health authority, allowing for specialized residential units for serious patients, as well as units for social rehabilitation, and policy actions seeking to abolish stigma. New initiatives will also pursue using digital tools to ensure access in mental health services, constructing a unified network, allowing for universal access to all services throughout the country.

MEP Susana Solis Perez, the Renew shadow rapporteur on the Parliament's INI report analysed the state of the negotiations with regards to the INI report on mental health, and expressed her satisfaction on the level of cooperation among political groups. She asked for a full social inclusion for everyone, and to diminish any stigma and discrimination. She also acknowledged the benefits of digital technologies and social media while calling for caution to prevent abusive behaviours and addictions that could lead to harmful effects on mental health, particularly amongst the young.

MEP Stelios Kypouropoulos stated that the INI report on mental health is giving us an opportunity to set the ground for a future European Initiative. He continued by underlying the need for further research on mental health, and by recognising the important role digital technologies can play, especially with regards to telehealth and for connecting remote areas. Ultimately, he highlighted that this not only aims to reduce stigma, but to increase awareness and achieve a cultural change in all Member States.

Both MEPs supported the need for a European strategy on mental health as well as a European year dedicated to mental health, to raise awareness.

The second panel was constituted by the President of the Hellenic Brain Council, **Dr. Christina Dalla**, and member of the Board of Directors at the European Brain Foundation (EBF). Dr. Dalla focused on the connection between mental health and brain disorders and analysed the value of early diagnosis, treatment, and innovative research methods, while highlighting the need for further scientific research. She argued that more data are needed to mitigate and respond to young people's mental health problems; therefore, the setting up of a European Brain Capital Policy Lab to track data, policies and recommendations would be more than timely. Boosting youth brain is key to a thriving society in Europe.

In the last panel, the discussion emphasized on digital technologies and the role they can play in mental health. **Dr. Elisabeth Steindl** started with a comparative analysis of the legislative framework outside the EU, and in particular Australia, and Canada, and commented on the new opportunities presented by the European Parliament's report. She explained how digital technologies could contribute substantially in achieving mental health coverage. Then the discussion continued with the presentation of the digital application "**Thymia**" by CEO **Dr. Emilia Molimpakis**. This app helps to identify mental health conditions and symptoms using voice, movement and behavioural data, showcasing how AI can transform mental health assessment. Finally, **Dr. Richard Rak** (DIGITALEUROPE) presented an overview of state-of-the-art telehealth solutions for mental health, while emphasising the need to construct responsible and context-specific data governance frameworks. In addition to explaining privacy and data protection challenges in the area, he proposed a set of policy instruments that could facilitate the adoption of trusted blended (hybrid) mental health ecosystems.

