



MHE Statement

TOWARDS FUTURE ACTIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF LIVING CONDITIONS OF PEOPLE WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES OR COMPLEX NEEDS

Mental Health Europe (MHE)'s vision towards the improvement of the living conditions of people with severe mental illness or complex needs is based on the ***principles of dignity, respect, equal opportunities, freedom of choice, non-discrimination and full participation.***

Mental Health Europe fights for better and humane living conditions with neither exclusion nor constraints. Patients or residents must regain human dignity and respect. Unacceptable violations, abuses and degrading living conditions must be brought to an end immediately. Institutionalisation starts slowly, with medical treatments, hospitalisation, seclusion etc. In the long-term, this often results in powerlessness, stigmatisation, and loss of dignity, self-esteem and social identity.

Mental Health Europe believes that patients and residents must regain human dignity and the respect due to all human beings. The improvement of the living conditions of people with severe mental health problems is a long process where changes can only be achieved through joint actions at all levels:

- policy and decision makers at all levels
- service providers
- professionals at all levels
- families and users
- media

Policy makers, be it at European, national, regional or local level must understand the specific needs of those people and identify different types of alternatives that match the great variety of their needs. Specific budgetary provisions should be put in place.

Mental Health Europe calls service providers and professionals from all levels and sectors (e.g. housing, education, employment and leisure activities) to work towards the empowerment of users to make them aware of their rights and benefits thus enabling them to express their own choices in their personal life. They should help people to re-acquire the rights of citizens: the right to vote, to have identity papers, to receive benefits and to take decisions. It is also important that they help them to recover self-esteem, confidence and competences as well as to learn new roles in life. Enabling those people to make positive choices about their own lives is at the heart of sensible mental health policies.

Improving the living conditions also means creating a dynamic atmosphere. Let the residents choose where to sit at table, what to wear, what kind of “work” he or she prefers. Getting a job or something valuable to do is the single most important factor leading to recovery from severe mental health problems.

Direct payments play another key role in the improvement of living conditions. These give people the power to take control over their own life and to choose the services they want. Unfortunately this is still a major problem for persons with mental health problems in nearly all European countries.

Mental Health Europe believes that family and users should be made aware of their rights and the crucial role they can and have to play in this process. They should be included in the whole process of de-institutionalisation as “real” players.

Finally, Mental Health Europe considers media to be a key ally in this process. Media are often those who have the great opportunity to bring cases of violations and abuse in the spotlight and challenge policy-makers and professionals to initiate actions for change.

Since the process of de-institutionalisation and living in the community never ends, there can be no conclusion beyond saying that ***helping people to recover their lives and rights is among the most important challenges for each of us.***

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