



# MENTAL HEALTH IN LOCAL POLICIES

## **Key messages**

- Growing costs to local authorities stemming from mental health problems are not sustainable, and the solution lies in promoting mental health and preventing mental illness.
- Local authorities provide leadership and coordination across a variety of public sectors – health, education, community design, employment, housing, transport, and social care – and thus have a key role in promoting mental health of the population.
- Returns from investment in local mental health promotion are high but typically show up in a different sector from the one in which the investments were made.
- Good local governance across public sectors, including processes for engaging people in local policy development, mental health impact assessment of local policies, and monitoring mental health outcomes of local decisions, strengthens the mental health of local inhabitants.

## **What is mental health?**

Embedded in socioeconomic and environmental frameworks, mental health is not just the absence of illness. Mental health is a state of well-being in which every individual realises their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.

## **Importance of mental health for local authorities**

Mental health problems are increasing cost drivers in many services of local authorities today. However, as mental health is built into everyday life within communities, there are plenty of opportunities to change these trends. Local authorities are closest to the communities, and are often responsible for a range of sectors such as housing, education, public transport, employment or social care. Thus local authorities are in a key position to support thriving, inclusive communities that create mental health for all, and support the healthy psychological development of children and adolescents.

## **What are the benefits of mental health in local policies?**

Local authorities have a key leadership role in bringing together services from a range of sectors to an integrated mental health response. Investment in the mental health of children and adolescents by different local authority non-health sectors is highly cost-effective, and will pay off in savings for both health care and social welfare later down the line. An integrated local authority response to the population's wellbeing needs creates social sustainability and local stability.

## **Recommendations**

- Local authorities should develop integrated structures at local level to create local mental health strategies, e.g. by establishing local mental health and wellbeing boards consisting of public services, civil society organisations and local communities.
- Mental health impact should be a prominent part of local decision impact assessments.
- Local authorities need to make wide use of cost-effective interventions to promote mental health, e.g. parenting support, school mental health promotion interventions and suicide prevention.
- Local authorities can reduce inequalities in mental health and prevent intergenerational transmission of mental health problems by creating mentally healthy and safe environments. This is possible through good urban planning, provision of good quality day care for all children, and creation of opportunities to take part in cultural, outdoor, sports and other recreational activities for all children and adolescents
- Local authorities' capacity and awareness for mental health promotion and prevention of mental health problems needs to be raised.



### Facts

- Research indicates that community involvement, associative participation and the opportunity to engage in community decisions is conducive for mental health at all ages, including children.
- Access to parks and green spaces within residential neighbourhoods has been shown to be an important pathway to generating better physical and mental health for individuals and communities.
- Mental health expenditure by local authorities specifically for mental illness has grown across Europe over the past years. There is strong evidence of good return on investment in children and adolescents in the areas of reducing conduct disorders and depression, parenting and anti-bullying programmes, suicide prevention, school mental health promotion and primary health care screening for depression and alcohol misuse. (OECD 2014)

### Mental Health and Wellbeing Boards at local level: An example from the London Borough of Redbridge (England)

The Redbridge Health and Wellbeing Board brings together a range of stakeholders namely the National Health Service (NHS), public health, social care, children's services, elected councillors, and community and service user representatives, in order to consider local needs. This multi-professional process ensures that local authorities plan the right services, increase mental health promotion, aid the prevention of mental illness and implement early intervention activities. It consists of a partnership board, which brings together a range of public services including adult social services, housing, public health, children's services, leisure, environment and community safety and GPs. The board is responsible for the formulation of the local Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which outlines high level priorities for improving people's mental health and wellbeing for the next three years. (Redbridge Local Involvement Network, 2012)

The UK Local Government Association has issued a joint guide with the NHS on how to set up mental health and wellbeing boards by following five steps: preparing for the board; forming the board; work programmes, priorities and commissioning; developing joint strategic needs assessment and joint health and wellbeing strategies; review, performance and looking forward. (Local Government Association 2011)

*Positive mental health and well-being is a key factor for social cohesion, economic progress and sustainable development in the EU*



### Further readings

- OECD (2014): Making mental health count. The social and economic costs of neglecting mental health care. Health Policy Studies  
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[http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9799241564359\\_eng.pdf?ua=1](http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9799241564359_eng.pdf?ua=1)
- WHO Europe (2009): Mental health, resilience and inequalities  
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- ESN (2011): Mental health and Wellbeing in Europe. A person-centred community approach  
[www.esn-eu.org/raw.php?page=files&id=39](http://www.esn-eu.org/raw.php?page=files&id=39)
- Local Government Association (2011): New partnerships, new opportunities: A resource to assist setting up and running health and wellbeing boards  
[www.local.gov.uk/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=8de46c26-afc7-42f9-bdad-a2535ba48863&groupId=10180](http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=8de46c26-afc7-42f9-bdad-a2535ba48863&groupId=10180)
- Mental Health Strategic Partnership:  
[www.mind.org.uk/media/343118/No\\_Health\\_Without\\_Mental\\_Health\\_Local\\_Authorities.pdf](http://www.mind.org.uk/media/343118/No_Health_Without_Mental_Health_Local_Authorities.pdf)
- NHS, Local Borough of Redbridge (2012): Redbridge Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2012 – 2015  
[www2.redbridge.gov.uk/cms/idoc.ashx?docid=DD42296D-14C5-47AC-A1E6-2BF81626B4EC&version=-1](http://www2.redbridge.gov.uk/cms/idoc.ashx?docid=DD42296D-14C5-47AC-A1E6-2BF81626B4EC&version=-1)
- Redbridge Local Involvement Network (2012): Looking at health and social care needs in Redbridge  
[www2.redbridge.gov.uk/cms/care\\_and\\_health/health/idoc.ashx?docid=f454c198-46f2-492e-9d15-c0459fc22765&version=-1](http://www2.redbridge.gov.uk/cms/care_and_health/health/idoc.ashx?docid=f454c198-46f2-492e-9d15-c0459fc22765&version=-1)
- The Scottish Parliament (2014): Mental Health in Scotland  
[www.scottish.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefingsAndFactsheets/S4/SB\\_14-36.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefingsAndFactsheets/S4/SB_14-36.pdf)