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INTEGRATIVE MENTAL HEALTH THE WAY FORWARD POSITION PAPER



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INTEGRATIVE MENTAL HEALTH THE WAY FORWARD

SUMMARY

A new ecosystem of collaborative person-centred care focused on prevention and a healthy lifestyle, resilience, health promotion, and health literacy is needed to meet the global mental health crisis.

Traditional Complementary and Integrative Healthcare can make a positive contribution to this new approach.

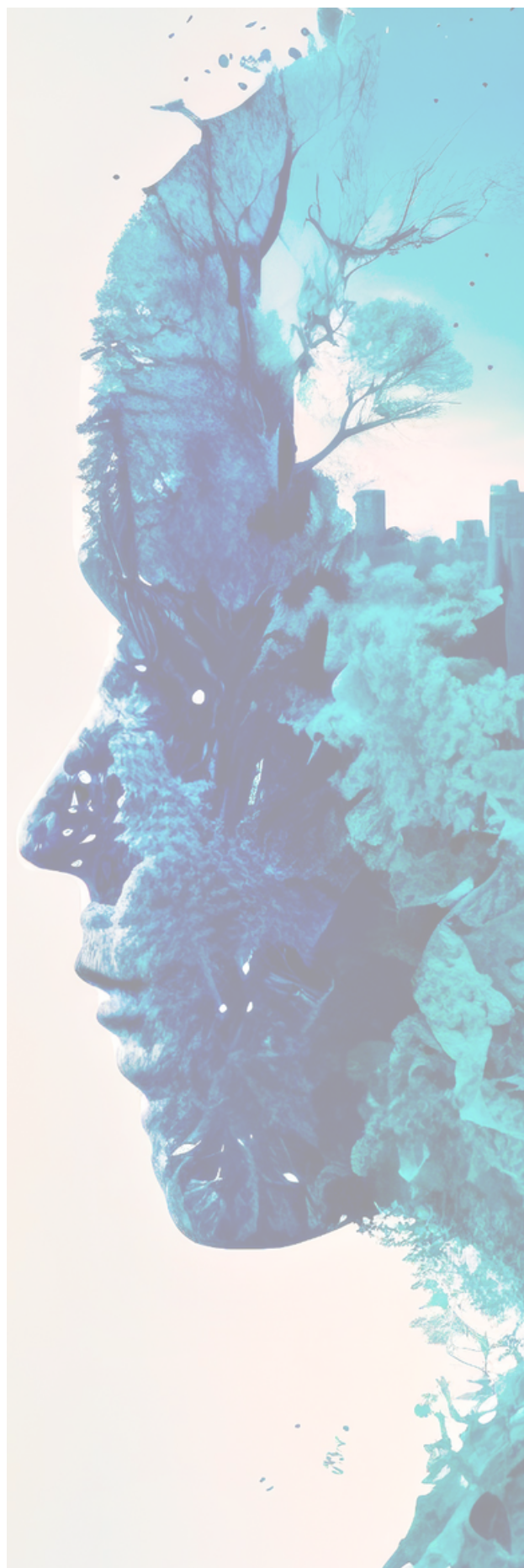
MENTAL ILLNESS AS A GLOBAL CHALLENGE

Mental illness is the pandemic of the 21st century and the next global challenge. Nearly 125 million people in the WHO European region were already living with mental illness before the COVID-19 crisis. Since the beginning of the pandemic, common conditions such as depression and anxiety have increased by more than 25%, and the rate is almost double that rate among young people.

Mental health is a primary determinant of physical health. A growing body of evidence demonstrates that mental illness is strongly linked to morbidity and mortality and is one of the main causes of the overall somatic disease burden worldwide. Several scientists have argued for a coordinated approach that aims to prevent the more classic NCD targets and mental health jointly [1].

CURRENT MENTAL HEALTHCARE

There are several deficiencies in the current treatment approach. These deficiencies are characterized by limited mental health care capacity, inequality in service delivery, and adverse effects of widely used medicines. The current model of care is based on an individual medicalised approach and focused on symptom reduction without consideration for social and environmental factors. It leads to fragmented care and health inequalities (limited access and poor outcomes). Mental health problems have a negative influence on everyday life, including family relations, schools, and employment.



ACTION FOR CHANGE

We need a change in the focus and practices of mental health care, including radical reforms in education, clinician training, and research. We must create an ecosystem of collaborative public mental health care, person-centred care focused on prevention and a healthy lifestyle, resilience, health promotion, and health literacy. Prevention should be seen as the outcome of effective medical health care: it leads to patients gaining agency and making better decisions for themselves.

An excellent example is the Icelandic model of substance use prevention through school and community-based health promotion. The model was developed in the late 1990s and early 2000s in response to high rates of alcohol and drug abuse among young people. "Youth in Iceland" uses a community-based approach that focuses on strengthening protective factors and reducing risk factors.

The key elements of the model are parental involvement, promoting young people's participation in sports, arts, and other organised activities, engaging schools in promoting a positive and supportive learning environment and encouraging cooperation between parents, schools, local authorities, and other community organisations to create a healthy environment for young people[2]. It includes investing in health promotion, health literacy, non-medical early interventions, and building resilience in populations – salutogenesis. The combination of individual with collective public health approaches can be highly effective, but a paradigm change is required to allow the two to work in synergy. This means developing different concepts, approaches and a re-organisation of mental health care.

All relevant stakeholders have to be convinced to collaborate in a public mental health ecosystem based on shared values of co-creation and introducing qualitative differences. Collaboration and adopting a contextual view of mental distress can lead to substantive increases in care capacity.



Creating an ecosystem of collaborative public mental health care, person-centred care focused on prevention and a healthy lifestyle, resilience, health promotion, and health literacy



HEALTH DETERMINANTS AND HEALTH DEFINITION

Health is mainly determined by factors such as genetics (22%), individual behaviour (36%), social circumstances (24%), medical care (11%), and natural environment (7%).

The currently used definition of health – 'a state of complete physical, psychological and social well-being and not only the absence of disease' – is a static one and needs to shift to a dynamic one – 'the ability to adapt and direct control of yourself with regard to the physical, emotional and social challenges of life'. Changing social circumstances and improving individual lifestyles increase this ability to adapt (resilience). Health then becomes no longer solely the domain of healthcare professionals but becomes everyone's concern.

CREATING HEALTH NEEDS TO BECOME THE NORM

Health creation is an inclusive concept in which all interventions, social, political, economic, or medical, aim to improve health are considered. This concept aligns with a new definition of One Health for a sustainable and healthy future proposed by the One Health High-Level Expert Panel in 2022[3]. It means providing the support, nutrition, and treatment that help improve the abilities that assure normal responses to life's challenges and sustain healthy homeostasis. When patients receive care that achieves this, their stress will reduce because they recover by regaining their capabilities to cope adequately with life's usual stresses (physical, mental, infectious). Consequently, patients will also gain agency, allowing them to make better choices and reducing dependencies (medicines, recreational substances).

To achieve this, methods and principles which increase health (lifestyle interventions, ecosystems, public mental health) must be examined and developed. Patients will then be able to self-manage rather than being principally concerned with removing or 'treating' symptoms or illness, and their resilience will improve in the long term.

These methods place individuality at the core of their working principles as each patient will experience their disease in their own way: the patients' illness is how the patient responds to life's stressors and how they experience their condition. The patient is not (only) the diagnosis.

This approach will help promote mental health, quality of life, and the prevention of mental health problems. Addressing mental health is crucial for overall well-being, as it is closely connected with physical health. Addressing mental illnesses in primary care settings will delay progression, improve survival outcomes, and reduce the health care costs of non-communicable diseases. In the long run, healthcare costs and disease-related absenteeism will reduce.



EUROCAM



EUROCAM is a European foundation uniting umbrella organisations of patients, physicians, practitioners, and veterinarians in the Traditional, Complementary, and Integrative Medicine (TCIM) sector. TCIM focuses on the whole person, is participative, respects individual choices and cultural diversity, and integrates clinical experience and patient values with the best available research information.

EUROCAM can guide the medical/research community on how and where to engage with this sector, employ this existing know-how and determine how it can enrich health systems. We strongly support all the policy efforts made to improve awareness of mental health and healthy environments but firmly believe that without health-creating medical treatments to help us cope better with mental stress, we are unlikely to make the progress we need. EUROCAM emphasises the need for a paradigm shift from treating and managing medical conditions to health promotion which requires a person-centred approach focusing on health education, health literacy, lifestyle coaching, and treatments that enhance health.

TRADITIONAL, COMPLEMENTARY AND INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE

Traditional, Complementary, and Integrative Medicine (TCIM) can play a significant role in treating mental ill-health alongside regular medicines. TCIM includes lifestyle interventions like healthy nutrition, exercise, relaxation, sound sleep, mind-body practices including mindfulness or yoga training, and natural health-creating methods such as acupuncture, Ayurveda, anthroposophic medicine, herbal medicine, homeopathic medicine, naturopathic or traditional European medicine, reiki therapy, and traditional Chinese medicine. There is growing scientific evidence demonstrating the positive effects of TCIM on mental health by improving the daily management of mental illness and building up mental and physical resilience.

Researchers have revealed that 55% percent of patients who followed an integrative therapy felt improvements in their depression and anxiety symptoms. More research investment is needed to enhance the understanding of resilience factors that protect an individual from developing physical and emotional illness in the face of stress and other pathogenic factors, and to identify optimal strategies for developing resilience within healthcare, as well as social factors that can be modified to support resilience.

More information about EUROCAM and TCIM can be found on our website <https://cam-europe.eu>
The TCIH declaration: <https://tcih.org/> The Traditional Complementary Integrative Healthcare Declaration has been signed by many organisations and individuals, illustrating the popularity of this sector.
WHO Traditional Medicine strategy: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241506096>

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- [3] <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.ppat.1010537>

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