

Common challenges

Analysis of the [National Project Reports](#) suggests the following challenges in moving mental health promotion/prevention up the agenda and gaining commitment and resources: we welcome examples of how different countries, both within the EU and beyond, have responded successfully to these challenges. We will be including examples on this website in the future.

- *Competing priorities*, for example the need to reform mental illness services or legislation may take precedence over action on promotion/prevention. In some countries, physical health problems such as coronary heart disease, cancer and diabetes are seen as the most immediate health issues and the links between improved mental health and improved physical health outcomes have not been widely accepted.
- *Predominant focus on prevention rather than promotion*, which may limit action to targeted interventions with at risk and vulnerable groups, rather than a population wide strategy which includes action to promote mental health for all.
- *Engaging stakeholders beyond health* involves demonstrating the contribution that mental health promotion can make to improving outcomes across a wide range of domains, including education, parenting, employment, productivity, crime, quality of life, relationships.
- *Capacity and resources*, which includes building knowledge, skills, motivation and training among professionals, lay workers and communities
- *Lack of political commitment/interest* is often related to lack of understanding of the potential benefits of improving mental health and/or to the view that the general public are not interested in issues of mental health and well-being.
- *Stigma/exclusion has greater focus than other elements of mental health promotion* – although tackling the stigma, exclusion and discrimination experienced by people with mental health problems is an important priority, in some countries it has proved difficult to achieve a focus on the wider elements of mental health promotion for example with parents and pre-school children, in schools, in the workplace, with older people, with black and minority ethnic groups, refugees and asylum seekers and those who have experienced violence and abuse.
- *Lack of evidence and evaluation* remains a barrier, although evidence of the effectiveness of mental health promotion is growing.
- *Public lack of awareness of mental health*: while in most countries there is a common awareness of key factors that influence physical health e.g. smoking, alcohol, exercise and diet, there is very limited awareness of ‘positive steps’ for

mental health and well-being and very few examples of public education campaigns on what the public can do to promote their own mental health and well-being and that of others, including children.