

Project Partners from 21 EU Member States and European countries, as well as their stakeholders, gathered online on 23-24 November 2021 for the kick-off meeting of the Joint Action on Implementation of Best Practices in the area of Mental Health (JA ImpleMENTAL).

European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety Stella Kyriakides, opened the meeting highlighting the absolute importance of this action, stating: *“Mental health problems were already a great cause of concern before 2020, affecting more than one in every six people in Europe. Of course, the pandemic has multiplied this problem a thousand fold. COVID-19 has reminded us all just how precious, fragile, and significant our mental health is. In this context, today’s Joint Action has the potential to deliver real change and concrete benefits to citizens across the EU.”*

The Commissioner also underlined, that *“We need to respond with a combination of urgency, investment, capacity building and innovation. We must base our efforts on effective collaboration”*. The new Joint Action, with a health system reform to develop and strengthen community-based services, and a multilevel national suicide prevention programme, will promote better mental health and prevent mental disorders. JA ImpleMENTAL can lead to significant benefits over time, for individuals and their families, and for society at large. Commissioner Kyriakides also draw the attention to the ambitious new EU4Health Programme, with the plan to do even more to promote mental health in Europe. A call for projects has already been launched to support the implementation of best practices tackling the pandemic’s mental health impact.

The meeting was kicked off by the Deputy Minister of Health of Greece Zoe Rapti, together with Policy Offer of Directorate-General for Health Noline Tamsma, Head of Health Unit of the European Health and Digital Executive Agency Florina Telea, and President of the Board of the National Public Health Organization of Greece Theoklis Zaoutis .

Following an introduction of the Joint Action by NPHO and JA ImpleMENTAL Coordinator Vasileia Konte, participants of day one, were informed about the work packages of the project, and about the expectations regarding the knowledge transfer, upscaling, sustainability, evaluation, communication and dissemination activities, as well as project management. Closing the day were short statements of members in the State Policy Committee and the Stakeholder Forum.

On day two, attendees followed the presentations of HaDEA and the JA Coordinator about project financial management and other coordination and management tools of the JA. Attendees were also invited to work at country team level in three parallel workshops. At the workshop, staff of competent authorities and their affiliated entities presented and discussed challenges, objectives and national execution roadmaps for the implementation of the Joint Action. Closing the day and the whole event were learnings exchanged at previous workshops.

Funded by the European Union’s 3rd Health Programme (2014-2020), JA ImpleMENTAL will run for three years and be coordinated at a European and national level by Εθνικός Οργανισμός Δημόσιας Υγείας (ΕΟΔΥ), National Public Health Organization (NPHO), Greece.

The Joint Action involves 40 organisations, 21 competent authorities and 19 affiliated entities from 21 European countries.

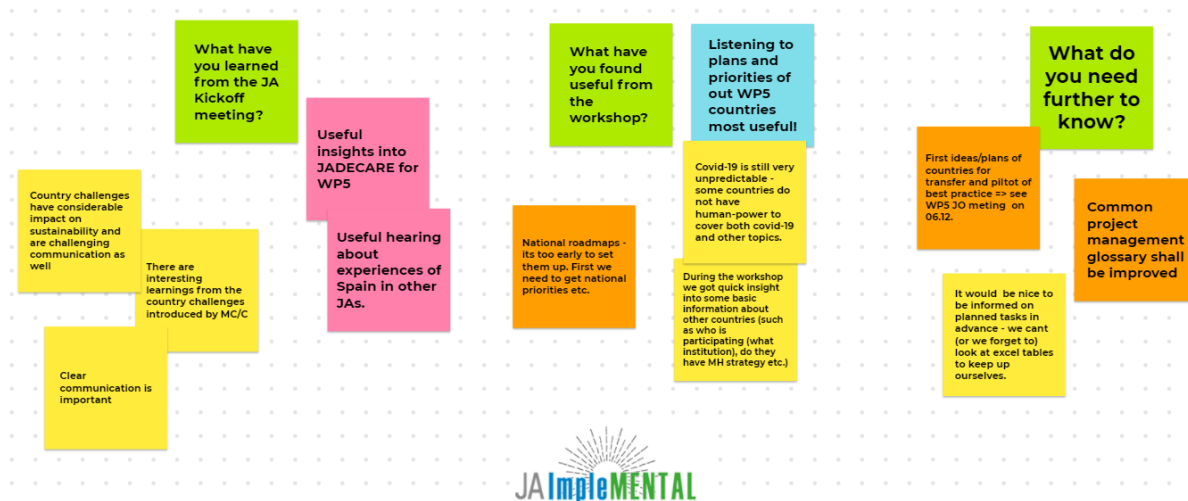
It focuses on the transfer and implementation of two best practices in mental health: Mental health reform in Belgium and Suicide Prevention Austria (SUPRA). These best practices have been pre-

selected by the Steering Group on Promotion and Prevention (SGPP) from the pool of the EU's Public Health Best Practice Portal which can be found on the following link: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/dyna/bp-portal/> . The aim is to extend the benefits of these best practices by transferring and implementing these as a pilot in the participating countries.

JA ImpleMENTAL aims to:

- Support Member States to improve and promote mental health via innovative and sustainable (mental) health system change;
- Reinforce capacity to address system transformation, in particular to support citizen centred and integrated approaches, increase system efficiency, build and maintain healthy alliances across sectors, and reinforce the coordination between national and regional authorities;
- Achieve a strong involvement of national/regional governmental actors to enable such practices to be embedded in health systems;
- Establish sustained cooperation of relevant Member State authorities in the area of Mental Health and involving a wide variety of stakeholders to share a common and global vision about mental health;
- Improve the mental health of children, adolescents and adults, by facilitating their access to care, as well as promoting and improving the continuity, quality and coherence of preventive, curative, rehabilitative and promoting mental health services adapted to their individual needs and provided in their local and social environment;
- Work across disciplines and increase integration of mental health in primary care thus contributing towards developing health-care services providing more person-centred, coordinated care to people with (often comorbid) mental and physical health conditions.

Learnings from Workshop 2 on day2:



Bottom line: 7 countries presented their teams, context they work in and plans they have regarding JA. We have a good mix of national institutes, ministries, federal institutes, and universities. Many countries have strategic documents on mental health and we are generally moving in a similar direction (strategy wise). We are still loosing a lot of sleep due to COVID-19 and it is a big risk for the future as well. Countries in JA have different governances and cooperating/communicating within the country will be a challenge!

About JA ImpleMENTAL

Depending on the space we have for the press release, following info may be added (or used in further communication, e.g. on the website of the JA <https://ja-imental.eu/participants/>)