



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF ETHICS FOR THE LIFE SCIENCES

77/CNECV/2014

**NATIONAL COUNCIL OF ETHICS
FOR THE LIFE SCIENCES**

Opinion on Bioethics and Mental Health

(February 2014)



CNECV

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF ETHICS FOR THE LIFE SCIENCES

A. Considering that

1. mental health allows each person to feel fulfilled, adapt to the stress of everyday life and contribute to the welfare of the communities in which he/she lives. Mental health has an intrinsic value and a direct relationship with the human development of the individual and the general quality of life;
2. mental health is inseparable from health – i.e. *there is no health without mental health* - and it is influenced by multiple factors. It is regarded as an individual and collective good;
3. mental health is linked to behaviours, lifestyles and the adoption of protective strategies such as adaptation, optimism, resilience, support and social cohesion;
4. the relationship between poverty indicators and social deprivation and the risk of mental illness is known;
5. a strong impact on mental health, resulting both from the financial crisis we are experiencing, the aging of the population and the prevalence of chronic diseases is expected;

Mental health is one of the greatest challenges we face, in Portugal and around the world.

B. Recognising that

1. it is important to promote mental health in general, as well as the rehabilitation and social reintegration of people with mental illness;
2. the legal and mental health policy frameworks are especially focused on protecting the fundamental values and principles inherent to human rights;
3. in Portugal, we have been designing plans and mental health projects that focus on rehabilitation, reinsertion and integration of mental health into the health system, which are not being properly implemented;

Mental health should be put as a priority for intervention in all sectors.

C. This Council issues the following opinion.

1. The protection of mental health must be taken as a political and social priority.
2. The Government must guarantee the basic right to protection of mental health, in particular through the definition of a scientifically supported political agenda for the sector.
3. The promotion of mental health is part of the responsibility of all social agents. As such, it should be integrated in all levels of the health system (primary, secondary and tertiary)



CNECV

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF ETHICS FOR THE LIFE SCIENCES

prevention, continuing and palliative care) and the risk factors and known predictors must be prevented, including those that emerge from education.¹

4. Programmes to promote mental health in the environments in which people live and work must be created and developed, taking care to ensure continuity and sustainability of the actions.
5. In all sectors, the establishment of actions that improve literacy in mental health should be disseminated and promoted, especially involving the education and health professionals.²
6. Because national scientific production in this field is scarce, the mental health interventions and their results must be present in the support lines of the entities that support and fund research.
7. Practices that ensure respect for human rights, particularly with regard to information and informed consent, both in situations of health care and research, must be encouraged and recognised.
8. Projects, plans and working groups developed in intersectoral areas should always consider the dimension of mental health.³
9. The contribution of evaluations and quality audits in various organizations should be appreciated, particularly for the identification of gaps and quality practices.
10. The projects with positive results in mental health and the cases of social cohesion must be appreciated, disclosed and subject to a broad public discussion, in order to reduce the stigma.

Lisbon, 17th February 2014.

The President, Miguel Oliveira da Silva.

Rapporteurs: Counsellors Lucília Nunes and Maria de Sousa.

The present opinion was approved in the plenary meeting of 17th February 2014. Besides the President, the following Counsellors were present:

Agostinho Almeida Santos; Ana Sofia Carvalho; Carolino Monteiro; Duarte Nuno Vieira; Isabel Santos; João Ramalho-Santos; José Germano de Sousa; Lúcia Amâncio; Lucília Nunes; Maria do Céu Patrão Neves; Michel Renaud; Pedro Nunes; Rosalvo Almeida.

¹ Mental health should be promoted in general and, in particular, with regard to the existential and socially vulnerable groups, paying special attention to people in times of transition or crisis, providing social and professional support for their adaptation.

² Mental health literacy aims to increase knowledge about health promotion and prevention of mental disorders, to aid the recognition of a disturbance and the knowledge about the options available.

³ For example, school health and the prevention of work and road accidents.



CNECV

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF ETHICS FOR THE LIFE SCIENCES

Hearings. In the context of this opinion, the following experts were heard:

Prof. João Eduardo Marques Teixeira, professor and researcher at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the University of Porto;

Dr. Licínio Lima, Deputy Director-General of the General Directorate of Prison Services and Reintegration;

Prof. Margarida Gaspar de Matos, professor and researcher at the Faculty of Human Kinetics; Coordinator of the project "Social Adventure" and the study of Health Behaviours in School-aged Children (HBSC), WHO.

Prof. José M. Barros Caldas de Almeida, Director of the Faculty of Medical Sciences; Director of the Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health of the Central Lisbon Hospital Centre.
