

Position Statement on Health

September 2010

The following represents the view of European Federation of Psychologists Associations on health. It constitutes the basis for the position taken by EFPA with regard to the development and implementation of EU policies on health.

1. *Health is part of life*

As a dimension of human life, health is tightly intertwined with well-being, creative and productive performance, and participation in society. These relationships must be taken into account in health research and health promotion. Health shall not be considered in isolation.

2. *Health depends on human activity*

Health, including mental health, is a continuously changing state produced in a path-dependent way by the interplay of genetics, exposure to environmental conditions, life events, personality, and human (individual as well as social) activity. The activity influences health in many ways: it can damage, strain, or exhaust, but also protect, strengthen, and recuperate the person. Understanding the role of human activity in health, including its mental and physical aspects and their interrelationships, is crucial for effective health promotion.

3. *People can manage their health*

Monitoring and managing one's health is a responsibility for everyone, and there is much people can do – individually and collectively – to actively prevent and cure illness, maintain positive health, and alleviate the impacts of chronic disease. Health education can help people to do this on their own, but informal care-givers and health care professionals can give them help and support.

4. *Psychologists have expertise in health*

Psychology as the science of human thought, feeling, and activity provides insights in the origins and development of health and illness that are complementary to those of the medical sciences. This expertise allows psychologists to contribute to health promotion in a number of ways. They can identify conditions conducive to good health, make valid assessments of psychical and mental health (including stress, anxiety and depression) as well as of psychosocial consequences of chronic disease, contribute to health education and the development of self-monitoring and self-management skills, enhance health motivation, promote the avoidance of health impairing behaviors, support behavior change to overcome substance-dependency and risky life-styles, and provide counseling and psychotherapeutic interventions.

5. *Roles of psychologists*

There are five types of roles for psychologists. *First*, psychologists constitute an important group of health professionals. Using diagnostic, educational and therapeutic methods, they provide essential services in primary health care, and in specialized services for general and mental health, as well as rehabilitation. While qualified to work autonomously, they often also collaborate with and support other health professionals as to obtain optimal health outcomes (e.g. promote adherence to medical advice). *Second*, work and organizational psychologists specialized in health care help creating more effective health care organizations and better quality of work for health professionals. *Third*, psychologists working outside of health care – e.g. school psychologists, work and organizational psychologists, community psychologists – make significant contributions to health by early recognition of problems that may have health impacts at later stages in life, by developing health awareness and healthy life-styles, and by creating living and working conditions that are safe and conducive to better health. *Fourth*, all psychologists regardless of their specialty can recognize threats to human health and help to prevent and remove such threats. *Fifth*, psychologists can, on the basis of their broad expertise, help developing and implementing effective health promotion policies.

6. *Psychology and health in Europe*

Psychologists are professionally well-prepared to deal with groups that are culturally, linguistically and ethnically diverse, within and across national borders. Psychologists are subject to qualification standards (EuroPsy) that guarantee a high level of quality throughout Europe.

**EFPA statement on behalf of its members
representing the national psychologists associations of 35 European countries- September 2010**