

DEVELOPING CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN PORTUGAL: CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES

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Introduction: In 2007 the Government launched a new Mental Health Plan (MHP), written in the spirit of international principles, including the WHO 2001 Global Mental Health Report and the Helsinki European Declaration. The new MHP includes a special section with guidelines for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) development. This is relevant, given that, according to WHO, 2 million young people in Europe suffer from mental disorders, sometimes receiving no care.

Objectives: Regarding mental health needs of the children and youth, the MHP focus on i. how to develop new CAMHS in public general hospitals, across the country, and ii. how to integrate CAMHS in the general health system (including primary care), in order to promote access and decrease stigma.

Methods: A national task force has been empowered by the Government to assure the implementation of the MHP, with external monitoring from WHO. This task force includes a team of child and adolescent mental health experts, belonging to different administrative catchment areas throughout the country.

Results: Relevant advances have been: appraisal of current resources, development of new CAMHS, planning of residential and day unit facilities for adolescents, mental health promotion and domestic violence prevention programmes, advocacy and stigma.

Conclusions: Despite several positive outcomes, CAMHS evaluation detected significant problems (access, equity and quality of care). Special attention should be given to CAMHS, namely through the increase of new services and new teams. Nevertheless, given the present crisis context, broad policies can negatively influence and restraint the mental health plan implementation.