



Mental Health Promotion and Intervention in Occupational Settings  
Project EU Horizon 2020

## PRESS BRIEFING

### World Suicide Prevention Day

More than 54,000 people in the countries of the European Union die from suicide every year. More than 90% of suicides occur in the context of a psychiatric disorder, of which the majority are depressive disorders. On 10<sup>th</sup> September 2020, the annual World Suicide Prevention Day (WSPD) will be held, a global awareness day with the aim of encouraging us to engage with each other and to join together to increase awareness of suicide prevention.

The EU-funded project group “Mental Health Promotion and Intervention in Occupational Settings”, coordinated by Prof. Ella Arensman, reminds us that there is opportunity to influence populations’ mental health and well-being through Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, which comprise more than 90% of all EU businesses.

“The Covid-19 pandemic has been an incredibly testing time for the global population. The day-to-day lives of many have been thrown into disarray due to the public health restrictions imposed by governments throughout the world. These restrictions have had a knock-on effect on our working lives as we adjust to the unfolding situation”, says Ella Arensman, coordinator of the EU-funded research project.

### **New work structures and environments due to COVID-19**

Unfortunately, many individuals have found themselves out of work for reasons beyond their control; an extremely daunting prospect for those who have been affected by the financial uncertainty instigated by the crisis. Others who are still employed are attempting to adapt to new work structures and environments; an unsettling prospect in its own right. Organisations and professional associations cannot underestimate the implications on the mental health and wellbeing of their workplace communities during this difficult time.

COVID-19 has significant short-term and long-term effects. On the one hand, the pandemic leads to increased stress, worry about employment and job uncertainty. On the other hand, the care situation for patients with mental health conditions is currently impaired due to a shift of resources, and those in need of treatment are less likely to seek help (e.g. due to the personal perception that COVID-19 is currently more important, fear of infection), which increases the risk of treatment deficits. Even more, it is important that workplace leaders can support their employees to deal with the unprecedented challenges during periods of isolation, in contrast to their typical work social environments. An open forum, in which workers can connect and support each other can serve to alleviate the feelings of loneliness provoked by quarantine. Signposting can also help those who feel

emotionally vulnerable; sharing information about [valuable resources](#) can help both employees to cope with their new reality.

### **Mental Health promotion will benefit workplaces**

Workplaces that promote mental health awareness, de-stigmatise mental illness and support people with mental disorders are more likely to reduce levels of depression, absenteeism, and increase productivity, and to benefit from associated economic gains. Attributes including compassion, empathy and patience are those that are highly appreciated during a crisis like this. The intense anxiety and feelings of overwhelm may have an effect on the deliverables and output of the workforce. Acknowledgement of the psychological impact of the pandemic and a lack of judgement can help minimize feelings of stress and burnout in employees who are struggling to maintain the same level of performance.

WSPD is a great opportunity to organise an activity within your organisation to promote understanding of mental health issues and increase awareness of suicide prevention. While we may not be able to congregate in person to mark the occasion, there are alternative possibilities worth considering, including online educational seminar or a self-care session that initiate open dialogue, encouraging those who may be struggling to seek help.

For more information on WSPD and suggested activities; visit [www.iasp.info/wspd2020](http://www.iasp.info/wspd2020)

Note: Certain media reports on suicides can provoke succeeding suicidal actions due to imitation. Scientific literature refers to this as the “Werther-Effect”. If you are reporting about suicide (prevention), keep in mind our media guide [Take Care – Be Aware](#).

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#### *About*

##### ***World Suicide Prevention Day***

World Suicide Prevention Day (WSPD) was first launched in 2003 by IASP with the endorsement of the World Health Organisation (WHO). The 10<sup>th</sup> September each year has been designated as a way of focusing attention on the problems of suicide worldwide. Specific WSPD activities have taken place in over 70 countries with the purpose of raising awareness globally of suicidal behaviour. This year marks the penultimate year of the triennial theme ‘Working Together to Prevent Suicide’. This theme emphasises the power and responsibility we all have to unite in the endeavour to prevent further premature deaths. This message is



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particularly relevant this year considering the circumstances we are collectively navigating through.

***International Association for Suicide Prevention***

The International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP) leads the global effort in suicide prevention having developed an effective forum that is proactive in creating strong collaborative partnerships and promoting evidence-based action in order to reduce the incidence of suicide and suicidal behaviour ([www.iasp.info](http://www.iasp.info)). Established in 1960, IASP is the largest international association dedicated to suicide prevention and to the alleviation of the effects of suicide and collaborates closely with relevant international organisations.

***Mental Health Promotion and Intervention in Occupational Settings – Project EU Horizon 2020***

“Mental Health Promotion and Intervention in Occupational Settings” is an EU-funded research project. The consortium aims at improving the early recognition and treatment of depression in occupational settings and reduce suicidal behaviour through mental health interventions that address a range of complaints and psychiatric conditions (such as depression, anxiety disorders, stress-related symptoms). The project merges experts in mental health, suicide prevention, depression, stigma, implementation science, health economics and other interdisciplinary fields. The consortium will build on proven concepts (EAAD’s 4-level programme, iFightDepression self-management programme and information website), which will be adapted to the specific needs of SMEs.



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