



Statement by Commissioner Várhelyi ahead of World Mental Health Day

Brussels, 9 October 2026

Ahead of the World Mental Health Day, Commissioner for Health and Animal Safety, Olivér **Várhelyi**, issued the following statement:

"More than 84 million people in the EU are estimated to struggle with their mental health.

To address the mental health challenges we face today, we must first listen to people, their experiences, their voice, and to turn what we hear into action. This is precisely the message behind this year's World Mental Health Day theme "Lived Experiences Heard: Real Voices, Real Change".

This is particularly important for children and young people. Many mental health conditions emerge during childhood or adolescence and can have life-long consequences.

Increasingly, the mental health and wellbeing of our young people are being shaped by the technologies and trends around them. While the digital world offers valuable opportunities for children to learn, connect and grow, it can also bring new risks and pressures at a particularly formative stage of their lives.

We are placing special emphasis on understanding the impact of excessive screen time and social media on mental health and wellbeing, especially for children and young people.

Our [Eurobarometer survey](#) on excessive screen time, social media and youth mental health gave us an important opportunity to hear directly from adolescents aged 13-18 and their parents.

The results are striking: around 89% of young Europeans report using social media every day and the earlier children go online, the more time they are likely to spend in front of a screen. Most concerning, nearly one in three adolescents report feeling stressed, sad or socially excluded because of social media.

We have listened to these experiences. And we are turning them into action.

Together with the recommendations of the [Special Panel on Child Safety Online](#), the Eurobarometer findings have already informed the development of our proposal for the EU Kids Act, which aims to better protect children online. The proposal places responsibility on online services to demonstrate that they are safe for children and gives parents the tools to safeguard their children's online experience.

The voices of children and young people will continue to guide our work.

This week, together with UNICEF, we launched the Children's Prevention Toolkit. It provides policymakers with practical, evidence-based guidance to strengthen children's health, including a dedicated section on improving mental health.

This is part of our broader commitment to put prevention and mental wellbeing higher on Europe's health agenda.

In parallel, we are continuing our work under the [EU's comprehensive approach to mental health](#) through a range of projects and investments. With almost €1.3 billion in funding opportunities, we are committed to promoting mental health, equal access to high quality and affordable treatment and care, as well as supporting people in their recovery.

This includes €9 million for the European Programme for Mental Health Exchanges, Networking and Skills, which is focussed on supporting health professionals. To date, the programme has involved around 3,600 participants across the 27 EU Member States, Norway, Iceland, and Ukraine. We are also investing €11 million in our partnership with the World Health Organisation/Europe to build

capacity across mental health systems in Europe.

On World Mental Health Day, our message is clear: we will listen to people with lived experiences, learn from their voices and turn their perspectives into action – shaping better policies, strengthening support and improving mental health outcomes for everyone. "

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