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# The Danish Approach to Mental Health

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## Foreword

In Denmark, we acknowledge the importance of mental health and are committed to addressing the challenges we face in this area. For too long, psychiatry and mental health have not received the attention they deserve. It is crucial that we now intensify our efforts and prioritise mental health.

We have developed a comprehensive 10-year action plan for the improvement of psychiatric care, which serves as our roadmap for transforming mental health treatment in our country. The level of ambition is high and substantial investments are required. The government will prioritise an additional 3 billion DKK, on top of a previous 0.5 billion DKK annual allocation. This means that the funding for psychiatry will be increased by 4 billion DKK annually over a 10-year period.

Our action plan prioritises prevention, early intervention, and equitable access to high-quality care in order to promote mental well-being and alleviate the burden of mental disorders. It particularly addresses the unique needs of vulnerable groups, including children, young people and individuals with mental disorders by establishing tailored and inclusive support systems. Our aim is to build a responsive, inclusive and compassionate mental healthcare system.



Furthermore, we place a strong emphasis on multisector collaboration to address mental health, leveraging public-private partnerships, and coordinated care efforts. These collaborations bring together diverse resources, expertise and innovative approaches to tackle complex mental health challenges and drive improved outcomes. By embracing technology and evidence-based practices, we continually enhance mental health services.

I hope this report will provide valuable insights into our approach to addressing mental health in Denmark and spark meaningful discussions and collaborations worldwide.

**Sophie Løhde**

Minister for the Interior and Health

# Introduction

Mental health is a growing concern among societies all over the world and studies show that the global prevalence of mental disorders, such as depressive symptoms, anxiety, stress, sleep problems etc. among the general population is higher amid the Covid-19 pandemic<sup>1</sup>. This constitute a significant personal burden for both the individual and their closest relatives, and impact families, communities and societies as a whole.

Mental health is often associated with stigmatisation. Negative stereotypes and misconceptions about mental conditions lead to discrimination, prejudice and social isolation. Furthermore, stigmatisation can prevent people from seeking help, hinder open conversations about mental health, and contribute to the overall negative perception of those who are affected.

Despite the fact that Denmark is known to be one of the happiest countries in the world<sup>2</sup>, it is estimated that approximately 25% of all contacts with the general practitioner (GP) are in relation to a mental disorder<sup>3</sup> and four out of five Danes will in their lifetime be in treatment for a mental condition<sup>4</sup>. In addition to this, 15% of all school children have been treated for a mental disorder<sup>5</sup>.

Although these numbers partly reflect an increase in transparency and early diagnosis leading to fewer unreported cases, this development is something that is taken very seriously.

The Danish approach to mental health is characterised by a combination of comprehensive healthcare services, social support and a focus on reducing stigma - and several efforts are being made to reduce stigma, promote awareness and create supportive environments to address mental health more openly and compassionately. The aim is to secure early diagnosis and treatment.

**Denmark allocates approximately 5.4 % of its gross national product to mental disorders.**

In Denmark, psychiatric treatment is primarily a public task managed by the regional authorities. The approach is holistic and involves not only the individual but also the family, education, school and the broader community.

Treatment ranges from conversational therapy, online cognitive behaviour therapy, and peer-to-peer dialogue, to – for more severe cases – medication, psychotherapy etc. for various periods of time. Combinations of these approaches are often used, and most treatment is ambulant.

The individual patient and their possibility of recovery should be the starting point of all treatment which should, when possible, be provided in the local environment so as to facilitate patient access and preserve quality of life.

## The Danish approach to mental health



**Digitalisation** is a cornerstone of Danish healthcare with technology enabling new ways to prevent and treat mental health disorders, often in the patient's own home. These digital treatment and support options promote equal access to effective and evidence-based mental healthcare.

**Civil society** contributes with a number of free services – add-ons that act in unison with public psychiatric treatment to support both the individuals and their relatives.

**Early intervention** is key in the handling of mental health in Denmark and numerous initiatives have been implemented to support people in the early stages of mental health issues, including programmes that target children and young people.

**The general practitioner** plays a key role as the entry point to psychiatric treatment. This keeps costs down and creates a coherent flow for the service user. However, cooperation between sectors is not straightforward and is an area of ongoing optimisation.

### The Danish healthcare system

offers universal health coverage with free and equal access to healthcare services, including psychiatric care, and is financed mainly by tax revenue (84%) with some smaller out-of-pocket payments, for example for dental services and medicine co-pay. The healthcare system is largely decentralised and divided into 5 regions and 98 municipalities, and is based on the individual's right to autonomy, with a free choice of hospital and general practitioner.



### Task division in the Danish healthcare sector within psychiatry

#### General practitioner

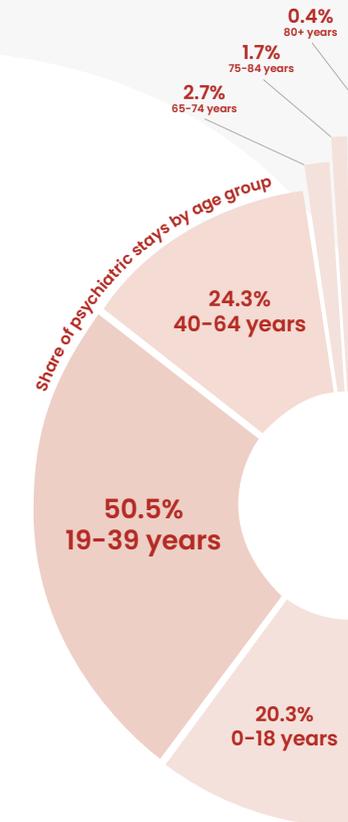
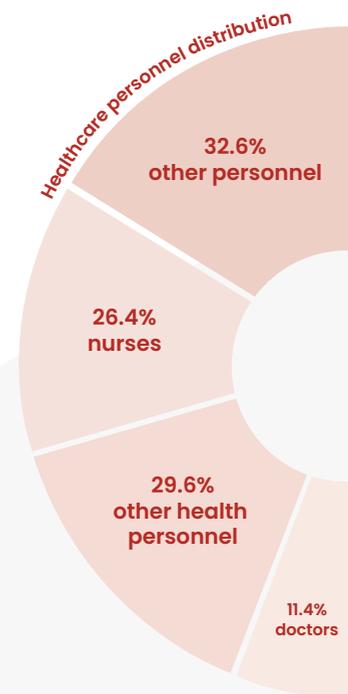
- Treatment of less severe psychiatric diseases
- Referral to psychologist or psychiatrist
- Follow-up care after specialised treatment
- Certification for sickleave and municipal rehabilitation services

#### Municipality

- Preventive treatment
- Social psychiatry
- Psychiatric homecare
- Psychiatric nursing homes
- Treatment of alcohol and drug abuse
- Rehabilitation outside hospitals

#### Region

- Psychiatric hospital service
- Specialists
- Psychologist and psychiatrist treatment



# Government strategies to improve mental health

The Danish Government has implemented several strategies to address mental health and psychiatry, prioritising prevention, early detection, and equitable access to high-quality care, as well as improving the overall mental health and wellbeing of the population.

## The Danish Government platform

In the fall of 2022, the Danish Government made a significant commitment to prioritise and advance psychiatry and mental health, accompanied by a historic investment in the field.

As part of this commitment, the Government will fully finance a 10-year plan for psychiatry, which serves as a strategic roadmap for transforming mental healthcare.

Additionally, a comprehensive modernisation of the psychology system is underway to align it with changing disease patterns, including the rising prevalence of anxiety and depression. This modernisation effort aims to ensure prompt treatment for patients, strengthen digital services, and improve geographical accessibility to mental health services.

## The Danish healthcare reform

The Danish healthcare reform prioritises mental health by improving access and quality of care. It emphasises the integration of mental health services into primary healthcare settings to ensure early intervention and holistic treatment.

The reform focuses on enhancing collaboration and coordination among healthcare providers, including GPs, psychologists, psychiatrists, and other professionals involved in

mental healthcare. Specific initiatives includes increasing the availability of psychological treatments, reducing waiting times for mental health services, and implementing strategies to prevent and intervene early in mental health challenges. The reform also emphasises the importance of community-based care, ensuring that individuals can access appropriate support within their local communities.

# The Danish 10-year action plan for the improvement of psychiatric care

In 2019, the Danish Government put in place a political agreement 'A fair direction for Denmark' (Retfærdig retning for Danmark), which declared intentions to implement a 10-year action plan for the improvement of psychiatric care with political goals for, among other things, reducing the number of re-admissions, reducing waiting times and increasing the average life expectancy for people with mental disorders.

Following the political agreement, an expert proposal for a 10-year action plan for the improvement of psychiatric care was formed in collaboration with key actors in the Danish healthcare system.

The expert proposal formed the framework for the 2022-political commitment to improve mental health in Denmark, prioritising 19 out of 37 recommended goals.

In addition to 'A fair direction for Denmark', it was decided to allocate DKK 600 million annually from 2020 and onwards to strengthen mental healthcare in Denmark.

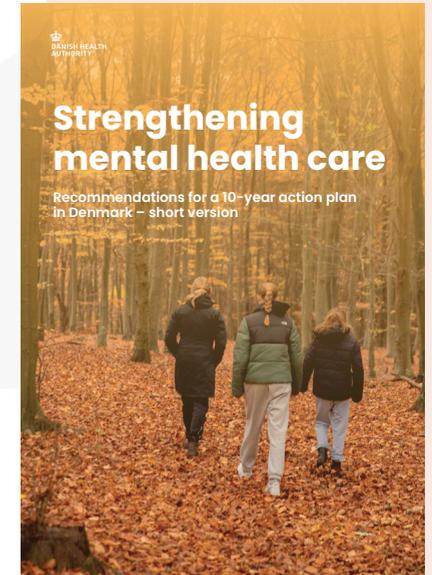


# Expert proposal for a 10-year action plan

In January 2022, The Danish Health Authority presented 37 recommendations that formed the basis for an ambitious and long-term plan aimed at enhancing overall efforts across sectors, addressing both mental health and a strengthened approach for individuals with mental conditions.

The recommendations formed the foundational framework for the government's action plan of a comprehensive 10-year plan for the improvement of psychiatric care, which prioritises 19 out of the 37 recommended goals.

The Danish Health Authority developed the recommendations in collaboration with the Danish Authority of Social Services and Housing. In addition, the authorities have consistently sought advice from a cross-functional advisory group and four professional working groups, with broad representation from governmental and administrative levels, professional associations and organisations, as well as patient associations.



Scan to read the report

# The 10-year action plan

In September 2022, a broad political agreement was set in place to enforce a 10-year action plan for the improvement of psychiatric care based on the expert proposal.

From the expert proposal, 19 out of the 37 ambitious goals are being prioritised, which encompass a wide range of initiatives, including mental health, prevention, early intervention, as well as both treatment and social psychiatry. Indicators are linked to the goals to monitor and ensure that progress is taking place.

The political agreement also included five areas of focus that were particularly in need of attention and help, and therefore prioritised first.

To ensure that the action plan is on track, **an annual status report is made on the course of the plan, as well as an ongoing professional assessment every 2 years.**

This work is done by the Danish Health Authority and contributes to an overview of the status and progress in relation to the indicators specified in the agreement.

The number one priority for the government is to establish easily accessible service at the municipal level for children and youth who experience psychological distress and exhibit symptoms of mental disorders. This also includes strengthening efforts for individuals with a combination of several mental conditions. These initiatives coincide with each other, as well as many of the 37 ambitious goals.

Simultaneously, efforts are initiated to create better conditions in both treatment and social psychiatry by prioritising the continuous ability to offer the most beneficial treatment to individuals with mental disorders and recruiting and retaining healthcare personnel.

The action plan is highly ambitious with the intended outcome being that people with mental disorders live better and longer lives, that they are included and accepted in the Danish society and that they receive treatment and services that are commensurate with the best in the world and with respect for the individual person's wishes and choices.

# Five areas of focus in the action plan



## Efforts for children and youth

Establishment of an easily accessible service at the municipal level for children and youth with psychological distress and symptoms of mental disorders



## The most severely ill

Strengthened efforts for individuals with severe mental disorders and an immediate capacity support package for the regional psychiatry



## Destigmatisation

Information and destigmatisation efforts



## Enhanced knowledge environments

Strengthened interdisciplinary and evidence-based environments



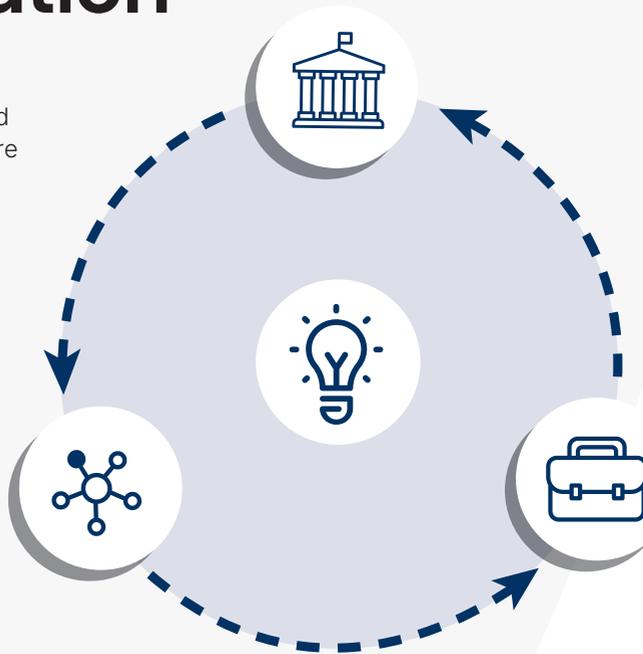
## Research

Improved conditions for research in the prevention and treatment of mental disorders

# Multi-sector collaboration

Multi-sector collaboration and public-private partnerships are vital in Denmark to address mental health and psychiatry. These partnerships bring together resources, expertise, and innovation to tackle complex health challenges and improve outcomes.

By promoting innovation, coordinated care, prevention, and early detection, we can scale and sustain initiatives that benefit all. Through these collaborations and partnerships, we leverage diverse sector strengths to create lasting solutions for the betterment of everyone.



## The mental health disease burden

- 25% of Denmark's disease burden (measured in functional limitations) is due to mental conditions (Mental Health Foundation Denmark)
- costs 110 billion DKK annually, primarily as a result of social benefits, production losses, etc. (Mental Health Foundation Denmark)

## CASE *The Lighthouse Life Science*

### Addressing healthcare challenges with public-private partnerships

Lighthouse Life Science is a public-private partnership dedicated to address complex healthcare challenges. Utilising data-driven evidence, emphasising implementation, and focusing on international scalability, its goal is to improve health equity and drive economic growth.

With a coalition of over **300 public and private partners, including regions, municipalities, pension companies, and knowledge institutions**, the Lighthouse fosters innovative solutions through diverse partnerships.

Initiated in March 2022 with an initial focus on healthy weight, the initiative broadened its focus in August 2023 to also include mental health. In line with national strategies and supportive of health policy priorities, this expanded mental health focus aims to support the Danish 10-year action plan for the improvement of psychiatric care.

It intends to establish an enabling framework that empowers public-private partnerships to find innovative solutions to support the areas of focus described in the 10-year plan.

Given the complex nature of mental health and healthy weight, the Lighthouse demonstrates substantial potential to explore solutions for other complex chronic diseases. By capitalising on Denmark's robust life science environment and long tradition for public-private partnerships, it plays a pivotal role in establishing a framework that empowers companies, regardless of size, to develop innovative solutions, ultimately advancing health outcomes for individuals.



# Digital Psychiatry

Like many other countries, Denmark is facing a challenging situation where the problem of increasing cases of mental health disorders is exacerbated by a lack of resources and psychiatric practitioners.

However, preventive action and digital solutions may solve some of these challenges, not least because digitalisation can mitigate the issue of geographical distance – a considerable hurdle in a country like Denmark with many small island communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has given rise to new possibilities in psychiatric treatment. Digital consultations and tools have become widely used with positive effects, and the collaboration between sectors has improved.

The aim is to deliver meaningful and effective digital offerings covering a broad span from early mental vulnerability to severe illness. The focus is on evidence-based, user friendly solutions with a high level of IT security and privacy, as well as on creating the right mix of digital and traditional treatment offerings in order to meet the needs of all types of patients.

## Increase in patients with mental disorders<sup>6</sup>

From 2009–2022 there has been

- A 44% increase in patients in the regional psychiatry system.
- A 32% increase in adult patients.
- An 87% increase in children and young patients.

## CASE Centre for Digital Psychiatry

### Web-based psychology therapy for an overlooked population group

Centre for Digital Psychiatry is a research and development centre within the Mental Health Services in the Region of Southern Denmark. The centre promotes the use of telepsychiatry and e-mental health to improve the quality and accessibility of care for people with mental health problems.

Centre for Digital Psychiatry launched the Danish Internet Psychiatry Clinic in 2014, which provides web-based psychological therapy for adults with mild to moderate depression and anxiety – a population group that has

previously not received much attention. The clinic offers an automated treatment course of 10-12 weeks with exercises and information adapted for the individual patient. The psychologist is only involved in the diagnostic interview and via supporting text messages during the treatment course. This way, the psychologists can help far more patients than through offline therapy.

In 2018, the initiative was rolled out as a national offering funded by a joint regional agreement.



1

#### Fill out the application on the website, [internetpsykiatri.dk](http://internetpsykiatri.dk)

It can take up to one hour, and a reference is not mandatory. All applications are reviewed by professionals to determine which programme, if any, is relevant for the patient.



2

#### Response in less than 2 weeks

Via Digital Post/e-Boks, the patient will either be invited to a video consultation or be denied via e-mail with recommendations to other, more fitting treatment options.



3

#### Video consultation with a psychologist

If we find a certain treatment relevant for the patient, a video consultation with a psychologist will be arranged.



4

#### Online treatment and follow-up consultation

If the treatment is still relevant, the online treatment will begin. The patient will receive feedback from a psychologist continuously throughout the treatment. The treatment usually lasts 10-12 weeks, and will be finished with one last consultation.

## CASE Navigating the jungle of mental health apps with MindApps.dk

### A catalogue of reviewed and tested mental health apps

A large number of healthcare apps have been developed recently, making it hard to navigate and find effective and safe solutions. Therefore, the Mental Health Services of the Region of Southern Denmark have reviewed and recommended a number of apps and other digital solutions for mental health on the website, MindApps.dk.

The app solutions are meant as add-ons to existing offerings in the psychiatry system and have proven especially relevant during the recent pandemic. These digital solutions have the advantage of being available 24/7 and that they are available not only for patients with a psychiatric diagnosis but anyone who feels that their mental health is challenged.

The image shows a grid of six app cards. Each card features an icon (a moon for DreamEase, a brain for Mindful Moments), the app name, a short description of its benefits, and a 'read more' button. The cards are arranged in two columns and three rows.

### Easily find the correct app for your needs

Quality-assured apps are gathered in one place, the App Library, so patients can navigate the jungle of mental health apps securely.

### Data security is essential

As part of the quality assurance process, app providers are inquired about their data handling practices. If an app does not meet the requirements, it is not showcased.

### Approved by professionals

All apps are professionally approved by two experts with a background in psychology or other health-related fields from the Center for Digital Psychiatry.

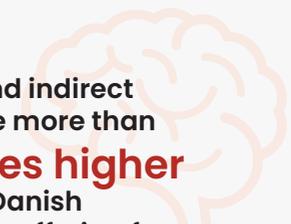
## CASE Fighting auditory hallucinations with virtual reality

### Future tool in effective treatment of schizophrenia

Despite medical and psychological interventions, 30% of patients suffering from schizophrenia continue to hear malevolent voices and 70% never fully recover. To address this challenge, HekaVR has developed a novel virtual reality (VR) platform that recreates hallucinated voices through avatars and real-time voice modulation, and provides patients with a realistic and confrontational experience.

Combining this unique therapeutic tool with a carefully designed therapy protocol, patients can confront their voices in a secure virtual environment, regaining control over their condition.

direct and indirect costs are more than **13 times higher** among Danish patients suffering from schizophrenia



**The Challenge study**, a collaboration between HekaVR, the University of Copenhagen, and the VIRTU research group, is the largest ongoing VR-based avatar therapy study to date with **266 patients**.

Encouraging preliminary results demonstrate significant improvements and voice-free outcomes in some patients and reduced negative impact or slower progress in others, underscoring the potential benefits of the treatment. Unblinded results are expected by end of 2023.

# Early intervention

Mental disorders in young people is a large and growing problem in Denmark as well as many other countries. Today, one in six Danish children is diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder before they turn 18.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, less than half of all young people who experience mental disorders seek help.

Therefore, an increased focus is put on early detection and early intervention in young populations – an area which is reflected in the 10-year action plan for the improvement of psychiatric care.



## CASE Mind My Mind – mental health support delivered like dental care

### Driven by the Mental Health Foundation Denmark

The Mind My Mind programme offers psychologic treatment for school-age children (6-16 years).

The concept is a result of a research project<sup>9</sup> driven by Psykiatrifonden (Mental Health Foundation Denmark), where methodology (in this case cognitive behavioural therapy) is combined with an organisational setup that enables evidence-based offerings

for school children in all parts of Denmark – much like how dental care is administrated today.

The treatment has had a documented clinical effect with **75% of the participating children showing reduced symptoms**. The roll out of this program to all municipalities to make it a national offering is being considered.

## CASE Early intervention for psychotic young people by the OPUS programme

### Better outcomes and lower costs

The Psychiatric Centre in the Capital Region of Denmark has established an early intervention programme called OPUS, which targets young people with psychosis or similar symptoms through a supportive and assertive approach.

The programme originates from research showing convincing evidence of better outcomes and lower costs through this method, compared to standard treatment.<sup>9,10</sup>

The OPUS project has, through an intensive effort and the involvement of relatives, improved the clinical progress for people with first episode psychosis. OPUS uses a concept with specialised assertive teams in which staff members have a reduced caseload compared to conventional mental health services. The concept is now a standard treatment in all parts of Denmark.

### The OPUS multi-disciplinary team



**OPUS YOUNG** evaluates OPUS treatment for 12-17-year-olds with psychotic symptoms, offering a comprehensive 2-year program of intensive psychosocial and medical treatment, including follow-up services.

## CASE Mindhelper – an online guide for young people in difficult times

### Evidence-based information online

Mindhelper is a national website that guides young people through difficult times and experiences. Doctors, school staff, or other adults can refer young people to Mindhelper. It also pops up in relevant search engines if young people look for knowledge or assistance online when they feel troubled.

The services on mindhelper.dk include evidence-based information, digital self-help tools, signposts to further help and Q&A's.

Mindhelper was developed by the Centre for Digital Psychiatry in the Region of Southern Denmark and received more than 1.2 million visitors in 2020.

1.1 million  
unique  
visitors  
2022

200,000  
unique  
visitors  
2017

Over 45 % of  
users are 30  
years old or  
younger

9 out of 10 visitors  
report that  
mindhelper.dk was  
helpful to them

More than  
1.1 million  
visitors in  
2022

## CASE Centre for childhood health

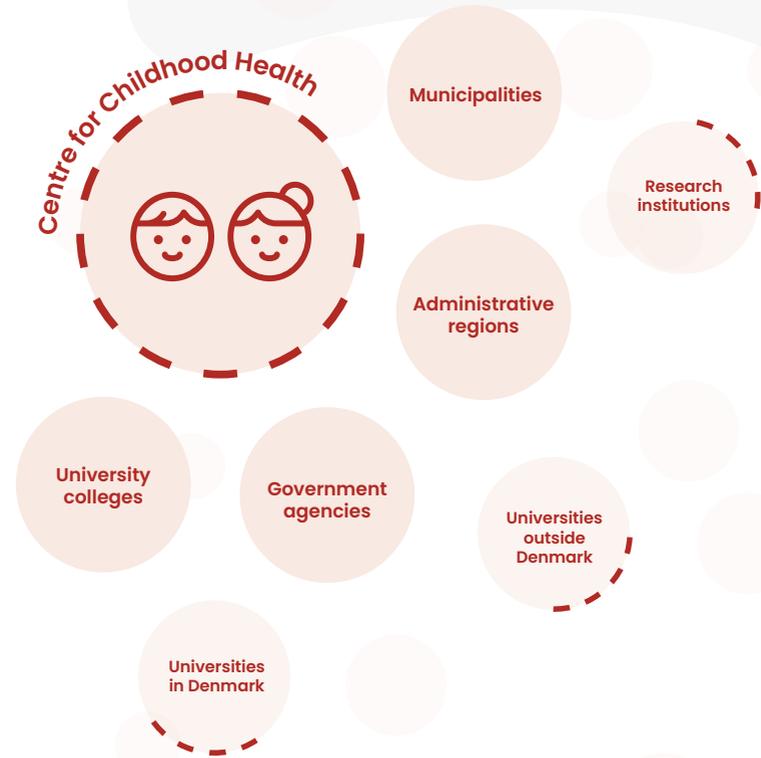
### Promoting the health and well-being of children

Centre for Childhood Health is a visionary partnership between the Danish Ministry of Health and the Novo Nordisk Foundation. The centre is a private association established in January 2023 to promote the health and well-being of children in Denmark in collaboration with central stakeholders.

The centre aims to generate new knowledge about interventions and sustainable solutions that effectively promote healthy weight and well-being

among children and youth, including the increased risk of mental health issues associated with childhood obesity, such as low self-esteem, poor body image, and bullying.

To accomplish the mission, the centre has identified four key areas of focus that will guide the centre's strategy: new knowledge, knowledge-based change and implementation, competence development and knowledge sharing.



# Civil Society Initiatives

In Denmark, civil society contributes to a high number of free services within mental health, of which just a few are presented below. Volunteers offer their spare time answering phone calls, online chats, and participating in physical meetings.

These services function as add-ons to the public treatment psychiatry to support both individuals and their relatives. Several of these initiatives are privately funded, and the synergy of civil society initiatives and public mental health offers reflects the strong culture of public-private collaboration in Denmark.

## CASE Headspace – where young people can talk anonymously to an adult

### National initiative for young people

Headspace is a national initiative for young people between 12 and 25 years of age and offers someone to talk to, free and fully anonymously, either in one of the more than 29 physical centres or via chat. Most of the staff work on a voluntary basis and everyone is trained in legal requirements and conversation techniques to secure a consistent method and professional approach.

Each year, headspace helps more than 10,000 young people and conducts more than 20,000 individual conversations. The service is funded by the national budget and private foundations.

Since 2013, headspace has consulted and supported more than **75,000** individual young people

... and held more than **155,000** consultations

**More than half** of young headspace users experience a positive development in their general well-being, and the effect is more pronounced with people with a worse starting point

**2 out of 3**

young people with initially high levels of loneliness experience a positive change and feel less lonely

**62%**  
Experience higher life satisfaction

### Boosting headspace

As part of the Danish 10-year action plan for the improvement of psychiatric care, the Danish Government prioritises easily accessible and high-quality support for children and young people with mental distress in local municipalities. The Danish Finance Act of 2023 has therefore allocated additional funding with the following key objectives:

- expand the reach of headspace
- provide comprehensive support to more young individuals
- intervene early to address mental health challenges
- prevent further escalation

## CASE Livslinien – a suicide prevention helpline

### Contact Livslinien anonymously by phone, email or chat

The Danish non-profit organisation Livslinien is a suicide prevention helpline that **offers anonymous counselling by trained volunteers.**

It is supervised by the Ministry of Social Affairs and is financed by both public funds and foundations, companies and private contributors. If you have a crisis or suicidal thoughts, you can contact

Livslinien anonymously by phone, email or chat.

Additionally, Livslinien actively seeks a dialogue with journalists about suicide prevention and suicide reporting with the aim of breaking down the taboos surrounding the subject.

## CASE The Danish Association for Depression

### A unique, national community

The Danish association for Depression is a nationwide association for people diagnosed with depression or bipolar disorder and their relatives.

The association was established in 1998 by four medical doctors who realised there was a need for patients to stand together to advocate for improved treatment options and better disease understanding in order to reduce stigma. This is still the ambition of the organisation.

**The association has a core of 150 volunteers that coordinate with 1800 members** and a large number of stakeholders to strengthen the community and increase knowledge of the diseases.

This includes peer-to-peer self-help groups, a social café in Copenhagen, outdoor events and courses, a summer college, and virtual cafés to create online communities for experience sharing.

## CASE GirlTalk – supporting and empowering girls

### Free and anonymous chat, SMS counselling and dialogue groups

GirlTalk is a non-profit organisation established in 2004 with the purpose of helping girls and young women (age 12-24) to strengthen their self-esteem and prevent mental vulnerability.

GirlTalk provides free and anonymous chat, SMS counselling, and dialogue groups and is based on the work of 300 volunteers. GirlTalk also deals with self-harming behaviour which is unfortunately a rising trend within Danish society.

### EmpowR GirlTalk initiative

EmpowR is a volunteer-based and free service specifically tailored for girls who struggle to thrive. The girls choose themes that resonates with them, and topics such as psychological and emotional difficulties, and challenges with social relationships.

**A study shows that EmpowR can potentially save society**

**10,300 EUR**

Per girl helped with handling her anxiety

**and 19,000 EUR**

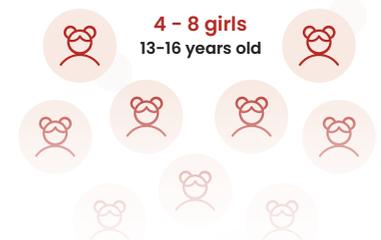
Per girl helped out of loneliness

**10-week course**

**2 volunteer facilitators**  
Women (22-35), who receive extensive training



**4 - 8 girls**  
13-16 years old



# Stigma and mental health

After centuries of taboo and a lack of knowledge about mental health and its associated disorders, it has never been more important to raise awareness, fight stigma, and encourage conversations about mental health.

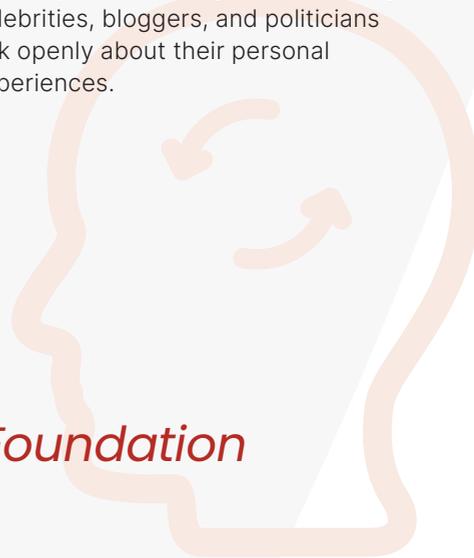
Because, when people with mental conditions share their own experiences and talk openly about their situation, the taboo is broken. In Denmark, we have seen more openness around this subject in recent years, and many celebrities, bloggers, and politicians talk openly about their personal experiences.

## CASE Mental Health Foundation Denmark

### 25 years of fighting stigma

Mental Health Foundation Denmark (Psykiatrifonden) is a private foundation which has worked to destigmatise mental health through easily understandable information about mental disorders for the past 25 years. The foundation works politically to create the necessary changes in the

society to support mental health. They also work closely with municipalities and NGOs such as ONE OF US and has also developed various campaigns – for example the **“Say it out loud” campaign where influencers talk openly about how they feel inside.**



## CASE ONE OF US – a national campaign against stigma

### The first destigmatization effort that is nationally anchored

ONE OF US is a national anti-stigma program in Denmark and is part of the national stigma reduction effort. The ONE OF US vision is to improve life for all by promoting inclusion and combatting discrimination connected to mental disorders in Denmark.

This is done by increasing general knowledge about life with mental illness and decreasing the distance that leads to prejudice and social exclusion. Ambassadors share their lived experience of mental disorders in many different settings, thereby creating identification and breaking down prejudice.

*When I share my story, I loosen up and become alive. When I share, I take control over my life. Because when I share, my weakness is converted to my strength. And when my experiences can be used for something, it is not just waste of life. It is magical.*

Quote from a ONE OF US ambassador



H.R.H. Crown Princess of Denmark talks to ambassadors from ONE OF US during her visit at Aarhus University Hospital Psychiatry in 2019

# Suicide Prevention

1990

The Danish strategy for suicide prevention is multipronged and spans decades. In the 1980s, the Danish suicide rate was among the highest in the world with 38 suicides per 100,000 inhabitants above 15 years of age. But a targeted effort led to a decline in this rate, reaching 11.4 per 100,000 in 2007, roughly where it still stands today and among the lowest levels in high-income countries.

Suicide is a devastating public health problem afflicting individuals, families, and societies. But Denmark's experience with suicide prevention offers some hope that prevention of suicide is possible.



## Measures to reduce the suicide rate



## CASE Suicide Prevention Clinics give long-term reductions in suicidal acts

### Suicide Prevention Clinics with national coverage since 2007

The implementation of Suicide Prevention Clinics as permanent structures has proven highly effective and has reduced self-harm and suicide considerably. The guiding principle is to establish aid for suicidal people so that they are not left on their own before other relevant support can be initiated.

The clinics offer counselling, therapy and practical support to persons with suicidal thoughts or behaviour. This therapy has been linked to long-term reductions in fatal (29%) and non-fatal (18%) suicidal acts.<sup>11, 12</sup>



## CASE Acute psychiatric emergency outreach 24/7

### National psychiatric emergency outreach services

The acute, psychiatric emergency outreach programme was developed in the Capital Region of Denmark and has now been adopted in all Danish regions. The aim is to help individuals avoid severe suicidal crises or provide support to people who have already

attempted suicide. This service is available 24/7 where a psychiatrist answers the phone and decides if physical outreach is necessary or whether a telephone conversation is sufficient.

**“It is important to intensify the support to mentally ill persons in high-risk periods, for example just after discharge. Close contact and help with practicalities are key to bring down the suicide rate”.**

**Prof. Merete Nordentoft**

*Psychiatric Centre Copenhagen, Head of Danish Research Institute for Suicide Prevention*

Suicide is seldom due to one single cause, but rather an outcome of several causes:



Biological



Social



Psychological



Psychiatric



Physical

## CASE Supporting citizen bystanders during and after medical emergencies

### On-scene support for bystanders tested in Region Zealand

In Denmark, more than 200,000 cases of acute illness or injury occur each year that require an ambulance.

in some cases so severe that they can develop into a stress reaction and PTSD.

Witnessing or intervening in an accident can have serious mental consequences, and if bystanders don't have the right support or tools to process the event effectively, it can lead to mental health consequences in the future.

Falck psychologists, paramedics and innovators have therefore developed and started delivering protocolised bystander support for better protection of their mental health by providing the right psychologic support for mitigating long-term and severe illness.

A study conducted by Falck shows that one out of four bystanders experiences difficult psychological symptoms, and

The solutions are being tested in Region Zealand providing on-scene support for bystanders.



# Modern psychiatric hospitals

People with mental disorders have increased mortality. In Denmark, suicide accounts for 40% of the excess mortality, while somatic conditions count for 60%<sup>13</sup>. Because of this, modern Danish psychiatric hospital wards are designed to hinder suicide attempts.

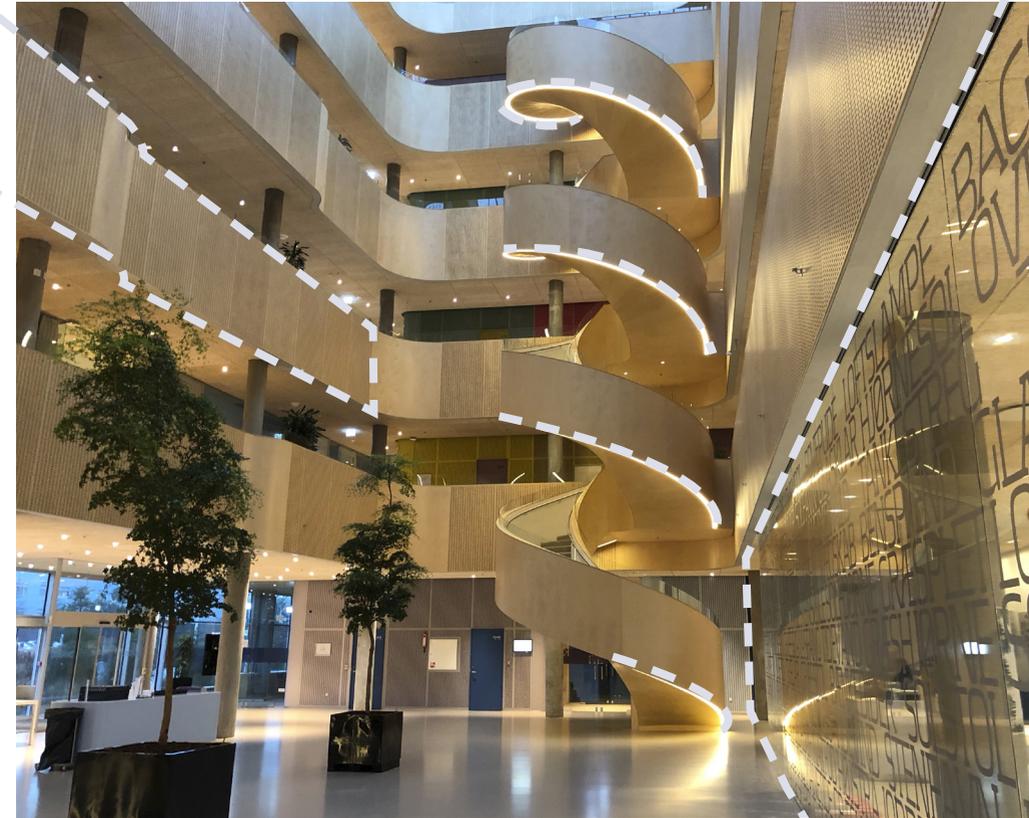
Furthermore, relaxing audio and visual effects are increasingly recognised for their positive effect and Danish super-hospitals include features to improve mental health through healing architecture.

## CASE Cutting edge architecture at Slagelse Psychiatric Hospital

### Slagelse Psychiatric Hospital, Region Zealand

The award-winning Slagelse Psychiatric Hospital is globally known for its healing architecture which includes the **world's most advanced LED lighting system and healing decoration**. Psychiatric wards have been redesigned to eliminate opportunity for suicide and elements of colour, light,

glass, and nature are incorporated into the design in a way that promotes mental wellbeing. The transparent architecture and tranquil spatial layout promote visual contact between patients and employees and **results indicate that this leads to decreased use of physical restraint**.<sup>14</sup>



**Slagelse Psychiatric Hospital, Region Zealand**  
 MIPIM Award "Best Healthcare Development" (2017)  
 Architectural Review Healthcare Awards (2016)  
 Farveprisen (2016)



**Natural and organic materials**



**Advanced LED lighting system**



**Transparent surroundings**

## CASE Ambient applications reduce use of constraints and medicine

### Reducing use of constraints and medicine

Wavecare specialises in creating custom ambient applications for diagnostics, treatment, and care within psychiatric hospital environments. Their innovative system incorporates ambient light and audio-visual themes, providing a reliable tool for targeted sensory stimulation in sensory rooms.

Wavecare has successfully implemented over 120 sensory rooms in psychiatric hospitals across Denmark, demonstrating the effectiveness of their approach in reducing constraints, promoting preventive de-escalation, and providing a space to evaluate patient coping strategies.<sup>15,16</sup>



## CASE Co-creation with patients and relatives

### Aalborg Hospital

At Aalborg Hospital, the involvement of patients and relatives has been replaced by actual co-creation in the development of both continuity of care and design of new hospitals.

For example, co-creation was used to modify the processes related to monitoring and analysis of suicide incidents. This process was positively received by clinicians, peers and management, and was implemented as a standard learning process in 2022.

A unit for co-creation has been established where patients and relatives are employed and take part in both optimisation of current processes and design of new processes.

Furthermore, co-creation was used to develop patient reported outcome measures for psychiatric patients.<sup>17</sup>



# References & Credits

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The Danish Approach to Mental Health, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition - October 2023  
A publication in the Triple-I paper series: Denmark Informs - Inspires - Invites

The 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of 'The Danish Approach to Mental Health' offers an overview of the latest developments, new and updated cases and revised recommendations in the field of mental health in Denmark. In addition to fresh statistics, the publication offers two new chapters, which present the latest developments in the field. This includes Denmark's comprehensive 10-year action plan for the improvement of psychiatric care, as well as the role of public-private partnerships in fostering a healthier society through multi-sector collaboration.

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