

The impact of the pandemic on inequalities in physical and mental health: lessons on race and ethnicity, and how to build fairer systems

Press release

Bad Hofgastein 2.10.2020 –

Today, experts on public health, sociology, mental health, inequalities, employment, and health economics reflected on the direct and indirect impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on health inequalities. Meeting at the European Health Forum Gastein, they focused particularly on the intersection between health inequalities and race and ethnicity, and on strategies for investing in an equitable and resilient social and economic recovery from the pandemic.

Their recommendations covered both public health and social policy strategies that may assist in mitigating the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic, with a special focus on health-promotion initiatives and community-based settings.

“The COVID-19 pandemic is amplifying existing inequalities in mental and physical health. The inextricable links between health, the economy and society have never been clearer and action is needed across all of these areas to ensure the pandemic does not lead to long-term deepening of inequality.” **Tim Elwell Sutton**, Co-chair (*Assistant Director of Strategic Partnerships, The Health Foundation*).

“The mental health consequences of the pandemic and economic crisis have already started to show and will continue to be felt in the months to years to come. We know that investing in mental health has economic and social returns. We need short and long-term initiatives focused on prevention of mental health issues that involve health, social, employment, education, agricultural and economic sectors. If we act now, we still have a chance to create a society with social and economic buffers in place to keep us mentally well and resilient in the face of stressors.” **Laura Shields-Zeeman**, Speaker (*Director of Mental Health and Prevention, Trimbos Institute*)

“The pandemic has given many people outside of the health sector cause to reflect on the problems with our health and social systems which we have known about for some time. We have the knowledge, research and good practices that show us how we can do better. As we begin to rebuild our economies and societies, the public health community needs to provide guidance and leadership in implementing intersectoral policies within and beyond health systems” - **Caroline Costongs**, Co-chair (*Director, EuroHealthNet*)

Notes to the editor

A recording of ‘Mitigating COVID-19’s impact on health inequalities: investing in an equitable and resilient recovery will be available online shortly.

The session was organised by the Health Foundation, the Netherlands Institute for Mental Health and Addiction (Trimbos Institute), and EuroHealthNet.

EuroHealthNet is the network of public health bodies building a healthier future for all by addressing the determinants of health and reducing inequalities. Its focus is on preventing disease and promoting good health by looking within and beyond the health care system.

The Health Foundation is an independent charity committed to bringing about better health and health care for people in the UK. It aims to foster a healthier population, supported by high quality health care that can be equitably accessed.

The Trimbos Institute seeks to enhance the quality of life of the population by engaging in the development and application of knowledge about mental health, addictions, and associated physical illnesses, both in the Netherlands and abroad.

Speakers:

- Nico Dragano, Professor of Medical Sociology, University of Dusseldorf
- Ghazala Mir, Associate Professor of Health Equity and Inclusion, and Chair of the Inequalities Research Network, Leeds Institute of Health Sciences, University of Leeds
- Laura Shields-Zeeman, Director of Mental Health and Prevention, Trimbos Institute
- Pilar Aparicio Azcárraga, Director General for Public Health, Spanish Ministry of Health
- Bart Vanhercke, Director, European Social Observatory
- Dana Burduja, Senior Health Economist, European Investment Bank

Moderators:

- **Caroline Costongs** (*Director EuroHealthNet*)
- **Tim Elwell Sutton** (*Assistant Director of Strategic Partnerships, The Health Foundation*).

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