

ADHD is one of the most neglected and misunderstood psychiatric conditions in Europe

Nessa Childers

We need to make this illness visible to society

Mary Baker

The EU has been urged to make "the invisible, visible" and increase public awareness of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

President of the European brain council Mary Baker told TheParliament.com, "A lot of people do not believe in [ADHD's] existence. So therefore, if it does not exist, then people do not understand that there is treatment for it. We need to make this illness visible to society."

Baker, also a consultant to the World Health Organisation and chair of their working group on Parkinson's disease, was speaking at the launch on Tuesday of an expert white paper on ADHD.

The white paper aims to provide policy solutions to address the societal impact, costs and long-term outcomes in support of individuals affected by ADHD.

She added, "There is a lot of support that can be given to children living with this disorder, if people start to work together."

If ADHD is recognised early and treated appropriately, the child "will get a better education, a better chance in the workplace, a better chance at family relationships and making relationships of their own", said Baker.

"It's an illness which requires good investment and I think teachers, psychologists, criminal justice, all need to come together and help society face up to a challenge that could be considerably better managed."

Baker added that it is "very difficult" for older people diagnosed with ADHD "because, like anything in life, to be diagnosed with [an illness] later is always hard".

She also warned that it is often something quite major in an adult's behaviour that signals the need for help, from driving offences to criminal activity, "So an early diagnosis to make an invisible illness visible is the way to go."

The term 'invisible disability' is often used to describe ADHD because of the lack of knowledge and widespread social stigma surrounding the condition.

Among mental health disorders, ADHD is one of the most neglected and misunderstood in Europe, according to the white paper.

ADHD affects approximately one in 20 children and adolescents across Europe, with many cases

persisting into adulthood, the report says. And currently, due to untreated or inappropriately treated ADHD, the disorder is creating an excessive burden and expense to society.

Co-chair of the European parliament's interest group on mental health, wellbeing and brain disorders, Nessa Childers explained that work on improving the situation for ADHD sufferers must begin at national level.

"We all have to go back to our member states and publicise this situation," she told this website.

The Irish MEP added, "As a clinician, I have seen adults who were not diagnosed with ADHD as children and the kind of damage that was done to them. I think advocacy and education is the way [to combat this]."

Childers went on to highlight how mental health problems such as ADHD are becoming far less of a priority on the political agenda, particularly due to the current economic crisis, which has resulted in widespread cutbacks in resources. "ADHD is one of the most neglected and misunderstood psychiatric conditions in Europe," she warned.

The S&D deputy said, "At member state level we must begin to share research and information. Some member states have very sophisticated support mechanisms for ADHD.

"It would be a good idea if we looked at that and began to reproduce them in all member states because, quite frankly, it doesn't take a lot, only a small amount of investment is needed to make a big difference to individual children, to school teachers and to parents."

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