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Superior Health Council demands more attention for mental health of young children

The mental health of young children is currently receiving insufficient attention in Belgian health policy. However, the first years of life are decisive for a child's further development. The Superior Health Council (SHC) calls for an integrated national strategy that focuses on raising awareness, supporting families, training professionals, and providing accessible care.

Investing in the early years pays off

The Superior Health Council argues that investing in the mental health of young children is an ethical, social, and economic necessity.

Scientific research shows that the early years of life have a decisive influence on physical and mental health, academic achievement, social integration, and future productivity. Investments in this period lead to better overall health, less inequality, and stronger collective resilience.

Moreover, the economic benefits are considerable: every euro invested in early childhood saves up to three euros in adulthood – partly through lower future costs for healthcare, unemployment, and crime.

Four key recommendations

1. Raising public awareness

Raising awareness about the importance of mental health in the early years of life is crucial. The public needs to be better informed about the challenges of parenthood, child development and the factors that contribute to good mental health. The Superior Health Council recommends targeted awareness campaigns for this purpose.

2. Supporting families

Families have an imperative need for support, both during pregnancy and after birth. The SHC advocates prenatal consultations and parenting support, supplemented by structural measures that improve living conditions. Families must have access to healthy food, quality education, play and leisure activities, and positive social contacts. Extra attention is needed for families in vulnerable situations.

3. Training professionals

Professionals who come into contact with families play a key role in the early recognition of mental vulnerability. The Superior Health Council emphasises the importance of training for professionals at all levels, upgrading all training courses in the field of perinatal care, access to recognised screening tools and close cooperation between all those involved. When vulnerability is identified, a care pathway tailored

to the child, the parents and their environment must be mapped out immediately.

4. Providing accessible care

Accessible care is necessary to effectively promote the mental health of young children. The SHC advocates the development of perinatal networks in physical locations close to families. These networks should destigmatise the request for help, facilitate access to care and ensure continuous follow-up of families.

An integrated national strategy

These recommendations require an integrated national strategy. Structural and political coordination between all levels and areas of power involved is necessary to prevent fragmentation of care interventions. Moreover, creating an environment beneficial to child development is a shared responsibility of policymakers, care providers, parents and society as a whole. Only when these recommendations are applied universally, consistently and transversally, can they achieve their full impact.

More information

The [full advisory report](#) (SHC 9742) can be found on the website of the Superior Health Council.

About the Superior Health Council (SHC)

The Superior Health Council is the Federal Public Service Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment advisory body. In order to guarantee and enhance public health, the Council draws up scientific advisory reports that aim at providing guidance to political decision-makers and health professionals. Thanks to its network of experts and in-house staff, the Council produces impartial and independent advisory reports that are based on a multidisciplinary assessment of the state of the art of science. Thus, the SHC applies a system for managing potential conflicts of interest. The Council formulates these advisory reports on request or on its own initiative and publishes them.

All public advisory reports and brochures are available on the website: www.superiorhealthcouncil.be



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