



APPENDIX 2:

ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO TREATMENT, SERVICES AND SUPPORT

BUILDING FORWARD BETTER

Every patient must have access to the health and social care services they need, including equitable and timely access to high quality treatment. However, disparities in access to healthcare predate the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe, and against a background of medicine and resource shortages, as well as decreased healthcare budgets in some Member States, inequalities have worsened.

The COVID-19 outbreak has exposed and exacerbated the vulnerability of our healthcare systems, including the unequal distribution of access to medical assistance, sickness prevention and health promotion services.

Unfortunately, the pandemic continues to place substantial demands on people living with brain, mind and pain disorders, their carers, but also on patient associations. The survey conducted by the BMP Interest Group on the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak has revealed that 95% of BMP patients are concerned by the limited support that the BMP community has experienced during these challenging times, while 90% are worried about the limited access to treatment¹.

For people with epilepsy, the main long term problems, assuming that we will continue to be impacted by the virus for some time to come, is the difficulty in meeting with the healthcare providers and shortages of medication.

International Bureau for Epilepsy

In response to the pandemic, there is a strong need to build more resilient health systems to ensure equitable and timely access to treatment, support and services. This is an opportunity to address longstanding access challenges and reduce access inequities for the overall benefit of the BMP community and wider society.

KEY CHALLENGES

While the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on access to treatment represents a major concern of the BMP community, challenges around access to services and support have increased in a drastic way. Recent BMP survey insights indicate that BMP patients have experienced numerous difficulties in accessing outpatient clinics, rehabilitation services and mental health support, as well as cancellation of surgical interventions. This is extremely

problematic as medication is only part of the ongoing disease management for BMP patients, which must also include integrated care and tailored support.

In addition to this, low awareness of BMP disorders among healthcare professionals, in particular in relation to rare conditions, may lead to additional barriers in obtaining a correct and timely diagnosis.

Despite the fact that effective therapeutic options exist, many patients living with BMP disorders are receiving inadequate treatment according to the majority of patients (67%), which is partly due to this lack of awareness, but also organisational issues of the health workforce³. This highlights the need to address national health budgeting and resourcing barriers, whilst also ensuring training and continuous medical education of the broader healthcare workforce and reforms to national care pathways where necessary to optimize access to care.

The 2018 Book of Evidence highlighted that underfunding impacts cost-effective BMP treatments being available for patients⁴. Unfortunately, this issue along with national and regional reimbursement processes, continue to be considered by more than half of the patient organisations (56%) an important obstacle⁵. Therefore, it is imperative to boost funds and resources for health and research in the EU, as well as continue investing in the development of HTA and reimbursement processes.

More than three quarters (78%) of respondents involved in the 2020 BMP Interest Group survey indicated that patients are unable to receive treatment and support in a timely manner, and that the delayed access to diagnosis poses great challenges².

ADVOCACY OPPORTUNITIES

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a reprioritisation of the health policy landscape, increasing the scope for advocacy on access to treatment, services and support. Moreover, there is an increased focus on addressing health inequalities from all perspectives, which offers further opportunities to engage around key policy hooks relevant to this area.

One of the most important hooks is the European Commission's proposal on a new, ambitious stand-alone health programme for the 2021-2027 period, the **EU4Health Programme**. EU4Health will make a significant contribution to the post-COVID-19 recovery by strengthening the resilience of health systems, improving access to healthcare and promoting innovation in the health sector. The programme will also provide funding for the digital transformation of health systems, which represents an opportunity to inform the reconfiguration of care pathways based on the learnings from the pandemic, and accelerate novel interventions to improve BMP patient quality of care.

The **EU Pharmaceutical Strategy** will seek to help ensure that Europe provides innovative and cost-effective medicines to meet patients' needs, thereby seeking to reduce access health inequalities, and support the European pharmaceutical industry's innovation efforts. The strategy will also include non-legislative action on shortages and a review of the **Orphan and Paediatric Regulations** that provide incentives to stimulate research and development for BMP disorders.

A funding asset at a regional level is the **EU Cohesion Policy**, which seeks to reduce economic and social disparities between regions. The fund addresses a number of different areas of relevance to the BMP community, such as Europe's aging population, e-health, healthcare infrastructure and health promotion programme. A key instrument of the European Cohesion Policy is the Interreg Programme which supports cooperation across European borders in tackling challenges and finding solutions in a variety of fields, including healthcare.

Furthermore, collaborative online tools such as the **EU Health Policy Platform** represent an opportunity to have an open dialogue with the European Commission's services, but also to enhance partnerships and share knowledge with relevant stakeholders that are working on addressing access inequalities in cross-border regions.

The BMP Interest Group remains committed to ensure equitable access to treatment, services and support, and will continue to support the work of third party organisations, which seek to identify opportunities and address challenges in optimizing research and innovation on brain health and chronic pain conditions.

KEY ASKS TO SUPPORT PROGRESS IN THE AREA OF ACCESS TO TREATMENT, SERVICES AND SUPPORT

The BMP Interest Group will continue providing a platform to reach out to policy-makers on the key issues and asks on behalf of patients who are calling for improved access to treatment, services and support. The key asks include:

- ✓ Mapping and addressing healthcare inequalities through multinational research projects and exchange programmes;
- ✓ Improving health literacy and ensuring equitable access to accurate, reliable and targeted health information;
- ✓ Improving timely access to the right existing treatments, services and support based on patient preferences by collaborating with key stakeholders and policy-makers;
- ✓ Supporting EU cooperation on health technology assessments in order to ensure patients' access to innovative treatment for BMP disorders;
- ✓ Improving cooperation on EU citizens' access to cross-border healthcare and providing clarity on arrangements relating to patient mobility across borders, such as transfer of patient records, continuity of care and reimbursement of treatments;
- ✓ Reforming patient care pathways by optimizing the digital transformation of healthcare in the EU and enabling innovative access solutions;
- ✓ Making more funding available for public health issues, including BMP disorders, as well as patient organisations in the field, through the EU Recovery Plan and regional investment funds;
- ✓ Investing in the European health workforce, and ensuring training and continuous medical education to optimize access to care;
- ✓ Identifying and sharing best practices on how to improve access to treatment, services and support for people living with BMP disorders.

TRANSLATING ASKS INTO ACTION

The Roadmap to Change outlines the agreed steps that the BMP Interest Group and affiliated stakeholders will take to pursue the actions in the area of access to treatment, services and support.

"Inequalities between EU Member States in relation to access to treatment, services and support for people living with BMP disorders have to be urgently addressed. This is why we need to join forces and develop, drive and propose sustainable solutions that create more resilient health systems post-pandemic, and ensure equitable and timely access to quality healthcare in the EU."

MEP Tilly Metz (Luxembourg, Greens/EFA)

REFERENCES

1. Brain, Mind and Pain Interest Group Survey, 2020
2. Brain, Mind and Pain Interest Group Survey, 2020
3. Brain, Mind and Pain Interest Group Survey, 2020
4. Brain, Mind and Pain Interest Group, Book of Evidence, 2018, Find here: <http://www.brainmindpain.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/BMP-Book-of-Evidence-%E2%80%93-2019-2024-web.pdf>
5. Brain, Mind and Pain Interest Group Survey, 2020

This appendix was created in November 2020, following a landscape analysis and stakeholder consultation to review the changing public health landscape due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The aim was to update the existing central policy document of the MEP Interest Group on Brain, Mind and Pain: The Book of Evidence.

This appendix sets out current challenges and arising advocacy opportunities to be pursued now.

To read the full Book of Evidence, access the Roadmap to Change or learn more about the MEP Interest Group, please visit: www.brainmindpain.eu