

# New WHO/Europe pocket book will support primary health care for children and adolescents



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WHO/Europe has launched its first-ever “Pocket book of primary health care for children and adolescents”, a comprehensive manual for doctors, nurses and other health workers responsible for caring for children and young people in primary-care settings.

Launched at an event co-hosted by the WHO Athens Quality of Care Office and the Greek Ministry of Health, the pocket book responds to countries’ calls for a redesign of child and adolescent primary-care services.

“Primary care is the most inclusive, effective and efficient approach to enhance both physical and mental well-being. This holds true for all population groups, especially children and adolescents,” said Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe.

“Unfortunately, the reality is that the primary-care services available to children and adolescents in our countries are not always optimal. This pocket book will empower providers to deliver on the promise of quality primary health care for children and adolescents – both in the WHO European Region and beyond.”

Although primary care is the cornerstone of care in communities across the Region, it is not always up to standard. All too often, providers lack the knowledge and resources to provide care that is evidence-based and in the best interests of the child or adolescent.

The new pocket book aims to close this gap by summarizing guidance on how to manage and when to refer children and adolescents presenting with common complaints and conditions. It also includes information to enable primary-care providers to care for children and adolescents with long-term conditions and diseases managed by specialists.

Its focus on evidence-based practices and prevention will help to ensure that children and adolescents receive the care they need while avoiding unnecessary treatments and hospitalization.

“In Greece, we are fortunate to have many paediatricians, especially in big cities, but we still have many remote islands where a paediatrician is not present, and where we have to rely on younger doctors and general practitioners for treating children,” said Greek Alternate Minister of Health Dr Mina Gaga. “This is where this pocket book will be extremely valuable.”

In the Region, mental health services in community and primary-care settings are often underdeveloped, underfunded, underprioritized and under-resourced.

The pocket book includes information on how to promote the mental health of all children, as well as how to identify and manage common mental health conditions at the level of primary care and through referrals.

Greece has renewed its investment in mental health services in the country, including through the appointment of Deputy Minister of Health Ms Zoe Rapti, who is specifically in charge of mental health.

“The national mental health action plan for Greece is being finalized now. At its centre will be a programme for child and adolescent mental health, which the launch and implementation of this pocket book complements in a timely and relevant way,” Ms Rapti explained.

Within the Region, Armenia and Romania are already spearheading these important activities. Dr Anahit Avanesyan and Dr Alexandru Rafila, ministers of health of Armenia and Romania, respectively, attended the launch of the pocket book virtually and welcomed the new, evidence-based manual.

In their remarks, they acknowledged its role in overcoming common challenges faced by primary-care workers in their countries, and announced that Armenian and Romanian translations will be available soon.

WHO/Europe will work with partners to ensure the standards in the pocket book are implemented in countries across the Region and included in financing schemes. The aim is for the pocket book to

contribute to changes in health systems that enable them to deliver quality health services to all children and adolescents who need them. Applying the guidance in the book will, however, require strong leadership, resources and political commitment from all countries.

WHO/Europe developed the pocket book with support from the European Academy of Paediatrics (EAP), the European Confederation of Primary Care Paediatricians (ECPCP), the European Paediatric Association/Union of National European Paediatric Societies and Associations (EPA/UNEPSA), Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA).

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