

# The Declaration of Rome 2003 – With Regard to the Promotion of Interest and Services for People with Intellectual Disabilities with Mental Health Needs

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*Abstract* The European Association for Mental Health in Mental Retardation (EAMHM) at its 4<sup>th</sup> European Congress in Rome, Italy, in September 2003, adopted the *Declaration of Rome 2003*, a policy statement designed to help promote greater awareness of the mental health aspects and needs of people with intellectual disabilities (ID). The statement accedes that all persons with ID have a right to the best available mental health care that is part of a nation's health and social care system. The Declaration is targeted toward public policy makers, administrators, politicians, professionals, researchers, and relatives or friends of people with ID with the goal of promoting and promoting increased access and more equitable provision of mental health services to people with ID.

*Keywords:* intellectual disabilities, policy statements, mental health

## BACKGROUND

The European Association for Mental Health in Mental Retardation (EAMHMR), founded in 1993, has as its purpose the promotion of international cooperation and exchange of knowledge and experience in the field of mental health care for people with intellectual disabilities with a special emphasis on coordinating and promoting scientific activities and improving standards of service provision throughout Europe.

The EAMHMR has organized four European congresses (1<sup>st</sup>: Amsterdam – 1997, 2<sup>nd</sup>: Uxbridge/London – 1999, 3<sup>rd</sup>: Berlin – 2001, 4<sup>th</sup>: Rome – 2003). The 5<sup>th</sup> European Congress is scheduled in Barcelona/Sitges (Spain) for October 5–8, 2005. EAMHMR, as an international organization, is open to all persons working in the field of mental health care or care for people with intellectual disabilities and to professional organizations that have significant interests in the area of mental health in people with intellectual disabilities.

Over the years, concerns have been raised by the membership of the EAMHMR that many children and adults with intellectual disabilities, additionally affected by mental health or psychiatric impairments, have not received appropriate or adequate services according to their needs. It was noted that as mental health is one of the most important prerequisites of social participation of all individuals, promoting, facilitating and extending opportunities of real participation for people with disabilities should be a priority of all our professional activities. It was proposed that the

EAMHMR adopt a policy statement promoting greater provision of appropriate mental health and psychiatric services to people with intellectual disabilities.

During the 4<sup>th</sup> European Congress, held September 17–20, 2003 in Rome, Italy, the Assembly of the EAMHMR discussed and on September 19<sup>th</sup> adopted the concepts inherent in this version of the *Declaration of Rome 2003*. The *Declaration of Rome 2003* was promulgated to promote both the awareness of the mental health aspects and of the special needs of people with intellectual disabilities, as well as raise the level of participation in service development among public policy makers, administrators, politicians, professionals, researchers, and relatives or friends of people with intellectual disabilities.

It is the goal of the EAMHMR that European politicians, members of the European Parliament, and the representatives of the European Commission focus their attention on this topic and promote and undertake the necessary development of adequate care systems and services for people with intellectual disabilities who have mental health needs.

The original version of the *Declaration of Rome 2003* adopted by the Assembly was edited for clarity, and updated for content, for publication in the *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*.

The Executive Committee of EAMHMR is composed of the President: Michael Seidel (Germany), Vice President: Giorgio Albertini (Italy), Secretary: Geraldine Holt (United Kingdom), Treasurer: Germain Weber (Austria), 2<sup>nd</sup> Treasurer: Patty van Belle-Kusse (Netherlands), members of the Executive Committee: N. Beail (United Kingdom), J. Hillery (Ireland), L. Igric (Croatia), R. Novell (Spain), L. Salvador-Carulla (Spain). The Secretariat for EAMHMR is located at v. Bodelschwingsche Anstalten Bethel, Maraweg 9, D-33617 Bielefeld, Germany.

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# European Association for Mental Health in Mental Retardation

## Declaration of Rome 2003

### With Regard to the Promotion of Interest and Services for People with Intellectual Disabilities with Mental Health Needs

We, as the organizers of the 4th European Congress on “Mental Health and Mental Retardation: A Lifespan Multidisciplinary Approach” and the S.I.R.M. 3rd National Congress, held from 17th to 20th September, 2003 in Rome, publish the following resolution:

Whereas, more than 500 participants from Europe, as well as North America, Asia, Australia, and other areas came together in order to exchange their professional experience and scientific results with respect to the mental health issues of people with intellectual disabilities, concerns were raised over the nature and quality of mental health services for people with intellectual disabilities.

Whereas, in accordance with the World Health Organization’s (WHO) definition of health, we understand mental well-being or mental health as a central aspect of overall health, with health being an essential resource for the daily life of every person, including people with disabilities. As mental health is one of the most important prerequisites of social participation of all individuals, promoting, facilitating and extending opportunities of real participation for people with disabilities is the priority of all our professional activities.

Whereas, in accordance with international human rights instruments and especially with the Principles for the Protection of Persons with Mental Illness and the Improvement of Mental Health Care, we understand mental health as a basic human right and further we assure that: All persons have the right to the best available mental health care which will be part of the health and social care system. This statement naturally includes people with intellectual disabilities.

And whereas, while the 4<sup>th</sup> Congress was a great success with regard to necessary developments in this field, it raised concerns about the persistent neglect of the mental health needs of people with intellectual disabilities across the European countries. We realize, however, that the theoretical interest in this topic and the practical progress concerning the adequate care by specialized support systems and services is modest and at times inadequate.

Further, we believe that the general health care systems and general psychiatry in Europe are not sufficiently engaged in this field. This fact is in a serious contrast to the increased and specific mental health needs in people with intellectual disabilities.

Therefore, we call on:

- politicians and administrators in all European countries to review and analyze the demands of adequate mental health care provision in their countries and to stimulate the development of special supports for people with intellectual disabilities with additional mental health problems (termed: dual diagnosis), and to make European research funds available in this area,
- mental health professionals to intensify their engagement regarding the mental health needs of people with intellectual disabilities and additional mental health problems,
- professionals in care provision for people with intellectual disabilities to strengthen their efforts concerning interdisciplinary work for mental health of people with intellectual disabilities, including health education and prevention measures of mental health problems,
- researchers to increase their research regarding adequate measures and conditions in order to promote healthy mental development of people with intellectual disabilities, and
- relatives and friends of people with intellectual disabilities to claim intensified public awareness of this topic.

It is necessary to understand the topic of mental health in people with intellectual disabilities as a compelling consequence of the application of international human rights instruments, and not merely as a consequence of professional experiences and convictions. Therefore, we call on European politicians, members of the European Parliament, and the representatives of the European Commission, to focus their attention on this topic and to promote and undertake the necessary development of adequate care systems and services for people with intellectual disabilities.

*Adopted by EAMHMR on September 19, 2003. This version of the original declaration was edited for language and clarity for inclusion in JPPID.*