

European Women's Health Network EWHNET



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EWHNET

The European Women's Health Network is a project in the Medium-Term Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (1996 – 2001) and is financially supported by the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Seniors, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ).
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EWHNET - The Organisation

EWHNET is a transnational network of organisations in the field of women's and girls' health. The network is multiprofessional and interdisciplinary; the project partners are organisations such as women's health centres, research institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGO's) and providers of public health services.

The network addresses agencies, key individuals and organisations that influence policy and practice in the fields of health services, health care, health education, health promotion, research and prevention.

Organisations from ten European countries are currently represented in the network: Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden. The network is coordinated by the Association for Health Promotion in Lower Saxony, Germany. The network welcomes further participants.

EWHNET member organisations seek to

- empower women to make personal decisions on health issues based on informed consent;
- raise the awareness and improve the response of health services to gender and social inequality;
- support women's professional and self-help organisations in the field of health;
- increase gender awareness in all areas of social policy especially in regard to health.

EWHNET links different areas of work. Its membership includes social scientists, psychologists, midwives and nurses, medical doctors as well as women's health activists.

Guiding Principles

The foundation of all EWHNET-activities is a social model of health that includes socio-economic circumstances, lifestyles, and living conditions.

The Ottawa Charter of health promotion (WHO, 1986) defines health promotion action broadly and based on the dimensions of building healthy public policy, creating supportive environments, strengthening community actions, developing personal skills, and reorienting health services. EWHNET also bases its work on the Vienna Statement on Investing in Women's Health in the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe (1994) and the Agenda 21 declaration of Rio de Janeiro (1992).

EWHNET focuses on health not disease. To achieve this, an intersectoral approach is required. Empowering strategies are a central component in the network. It also emphasises the necessity of linking gender mainstreaming to specific equality strategies, women's participation and advocacy.

Aims

EWHNET is committed to:

- supporting a resource-oriented approach empowering women and countering unnecessary medicalisation;
- focusing on the question of how to produce and maintain health instead on how illness can be avoided
- raising awareness of the specific needs of women in the health system and health care;
- identifying models of good practice that contribute to women's and girls' health and seeking to communicate and profile good practice;
- promoting the implementation of a social model of health at local and regional levels;
- developing networking on key topics and communication on good strategies on national and transnational European level;
- developing political strategies to achieve equity for women.

Fields of Work

To achieve these aims EWHNET works to

- provide information on approaches to women's health promotion, improve access to good practices and to potential cooperation partners
- disseminate information through country reports
- build partnerships between projects and key individuals in the field of women's health;
- develop communication and mutual understanding among diverse participating organisations with different cultural, professional and practical backgrounds;
- develop common strategies for better integration and acceptance of women-centered practical methods in the field of health;
- identify the characteristics of innovative strategies and stimulate their transfer;
- develop, document and disseminate standards of good practice;
- establish working groups on important topics such as women, work and health, health promotion for girls at school, women-centered psychotherapy;
- uncover and explore issues of concern for women's health in the European context.

Working Methods

The network is based on collaboration, mutual respect, participation and active membership. It works through

- building partnerships, personal exchange and discussion of perspectives;
- organising workshops and working groups focusing on specific topics.

The network operates through transnational meetings. As an umbrella organisation EWHNET offers its support for networking and for disseminating information.

Membership

For each new member country the contact organisation provides a country report on the main topics and the structures in the field of women and health with a list of relevant addresses (self-help groups, NGOs, initiatives, women's health providers).

Participating organisations take responsibility for conferences and transnational meetings of EWHNET. Members are responsible for maintaining a flow of information within each country and cooperate in regional or national networks. Members identify new topics, research studies and models of practice for the network. They are encouraged to promote the visibility and profile of EWHNET in their home countries.

Working language of EWHNET is English.



Future Activities

EWHNET will initiate or intensify cooperation with relevant organisations that lobby in the field of women's health. The expertise of EWHNET members will be made available at the political level. EWHNET is developing a trainee exchange programme as a new strategy to share experiences. EWHNET is in the process of developing a basis for communication between partner organisations in Southern and Northern European countries as well as between Eastern and Western countries.

Funding

Funded since 1997 as a project in the Medium-Term Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men and financially supported by the Ministry for Family Affairs, Seniors, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ Germany), EWHNET is seeking funding sources to establish sustainable network structures.

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