



edsa
European Dental
Students' Association

Dental Students' Mental Health

European Dental Students' Association

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1. Introduction

Dental education is recognised globally as one of the most academically and emotionally demanding fields in higher education. Across Europe and worldwide, dental students face disproportionately high rates of psychological distress, including stress, anxiety, burnout, depression, and sleep disturbances (Basudan et al., 2021; Gorter et al., 2022). This mental health burden has intensified in recent years due to rising academic pressures, financial insecurity, clinical expectations, and post-pandemic effects on education and healthcare systems.

Mental health challenges do not exist in isolation. They impact academic performance, clinical competence, interpersonal relationships, and long-term professional sustainability. Furthermore, persistent stigma around mental health often prevents students from seeking help, exacerbating the problem.

In line with the WHO Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2030, and the European Commission's Youth Mental Health Strategy (2023), EDSA affirms that student wellbeing is a core public health and educational priority. Mental health promotion is essential not only for student success, but also for providing safe, compassionate patient care and developing ethical professional skills.

2. Definitions

- **Mental Health:** A state of well-being in which individuals can cope with stress, work productively, realise their abilities, and contribute to their community (WHO).
- **Psychological Distress:** Emotional suffering typically involving symptoms of depression, anxiety, or burnout that interfere with daily functioning.
- **Wellbeing:** A holistic concept encompassing physical, mental, emotional, and social health.
- **Burnout:** A work-related condition characterised by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, especially prevalent in health professions.
- **Resilience:** The ability to recover from adversity and maintain mental wellness through internal and external resources.
- **Peer Support:** Structured mutual support by trained students or peers to enhance mental health and reduce stigma.

3. Purpose

This policy establishes EDSA's commitment to:

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- Promoting mental health awareness, literacy, and support systems across all European dental schools.
 - Advocating for mental health to be treated with equal importance as physical health within academic and clinical training.
 - Supporting institutional, systemic, and peer-led initiatives that foster a culture of openness, empathy, and prevention.
 - Ensuring psychosocial safety, academic equity, and inclusive student support, especially for students from marginalised or vulnerable backgrounds.
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4. Scope

This policy applies to:

- Dental students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels across Europe.
- Dental schools and faculties, including administrators, faculty, clinical staff, and support services.
- Student unions, national dental associations, mental health advocates, and allied health professionals engaged in higher education wellbeing.
- All EDSA member organisations, campaigns, and platforms.
- The scope includes curriculum design, student services, research, community support models, digital wellbeing tools, and broader advocacy for system-level mental health reforms.

5. Policy Statement

1. Mental Health Education and Awareness

- Mental health literacy should be embedded within dental curricula, including stress management, coping strategies, burnout prevention, and emotional intelligence.
- Promote mandatory orientation workshops on self-care, time management, and seeking support.
- Encourage faculty and staff training to recognise signs of distress and respond supportively.
- Normalise conversations around mental health through awareness weeks, campaigns, and peer storytelling, reducing stigma across campuses.

2. Access to Mental Health Services and Support

- Institutions must provide free, timely, and confidential psychological services, including access to licensed counsellors, psychologists, and mental health professionals.
- Ensure availability of multiple access pathways: in-person, digital, multilingual, and disability-accessible.
- Promote mental health first aid training for students, mentors, and faculty members.
- Facilitate referral systems between student services, primary care, and specialised mental health providers.

3. Safe, Supportive Learning Environments

- Regularly assess and reduce toxic stressors in dental education, such as excessive workloads, unrealistic performance expectations, and authoritarian teaching.
- Make acceptable adjustments and accommodations for students with mental health issues without imposing academic consequences.
- Encourage work-life balance, protected study breaks, proper rest, and a reduced academic workload.
- Encourage mentorship programs that promote supportive connections and professional development.

4. Student-Led and Peer-Support Initiatives

- Support the development of student-run mental health associations, listening groups, and mentorship networks.
- Provide funding and institutional support for peer-support training programs modelled on evidence-based approaches (e.g. Mental Health First Aid, Active Minds).
- Recognise the lived experience of students in co-designing mental health programs that meet their actual needs.

5. Monitoring, evaluation, and accountability

- Conduct annual anonymous mental health surveys among students to monitor well-being indicators, service utilisation, and new problems.
- Use data to inform targeted interventions and policy adjustments while ensuring inclusion and intersectionality.
- Establish student wellbeing committees in each faculty, with student representation and decision-making authority.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

EDSA Board and Policy Officers: Coordinate mental health policy development, campaigns, and reporting across Europe.

Dental Schools and Institutions: Establish sustainable mental health infrastructure, integrate EDI and wellness into strategic plans, and evaluate outcomes.

Faculty and Clinical Staff: Create psychologically safe educational environments; model empathy and open communication.

Students and Unions: Participate in mental health advocacy, peer support initiatives, and co-creation of solutions.

7. Related Documents

- WHO Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2030
 - European Commission (2023): Youth Mental Health Strategy
 - UNESCO (2022): Guidelines for Promoting Mental Health in Higher Education
 - FDI Vision 2030: Delivering Optimal Oral Health for All – Workforce Wellbeing and Resilience
 - Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union: Article 35 (Health care)
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8. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

If you have any further inquiries regarding this policy, please contact the EDSA Policy Officer at policy_officer@edsaweb.org.

9. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years by the current Policy Officer of EDSA. It will be aligned with global health priorities and will incorporate feedback from professionals, stakeholders, and the community.



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