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REFORMING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN PORTUGAL

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Introduction: Analysis of the mental health system in Portugal reveals some positive aspects in its development through recent decades, namely in what concerns the creation of decentralised services and rehabilitation programs. Despite this, Portuguese mental health services (MHS) still suffer from significant deficiencies, in terms of accessibility, equity and quality of care. There is a large gap between the number of people affected with mental disorders and those receiving treatment: for an estimated prevalence of 16.07%, the number of people receiving treatment in MHS was estimated to be 1.7%.

Objectives: The major objectives of the new National Mental Health Plan are:

- 1) Assure equal access to care,
- 2) Promote and protect human rights
- 3) Reduce the impact of mental health disorders
- 4) Promote community delivery of care,
- 5) Promote the integration of MHS in the general health services.

Methods: A National Coordination Body for Mental Health has been empowered to assure the implementation of the National Mental Health Plan, with external monitoring by WHO.

Results: Since the last three years, there has been significant changes and improvements at the following levels: new legislation, creation of new MHS, forensic services, financing model, residential facilities (long term care), deinstitutionalization, training, programs for homeless people, domestic violence, advocacy and stigma.

Conclusions: The implementation of the mental health plan can help to overcome some of the problems present in MHS in Portugal. Special attention should be given to the financing model, as it represents a crucial restraint to the development of the MHS.