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Efforts focused on prevention and early intervention may have a significant impact on public health by avoiding onset of mental illness and limiting severity of onset. The European project ProYouth investigates the potential of an Internet-based program in the prevention and early intervention of eating disorders where we know that only a minority of affected individuals seek professional help and additionally we often see a substantial delay between symptom onset and the uptake of treatment.

The functions of the ProYouth online platform are a) to raise awareness and to educate about eating disorders, b) to provide individualized feedback on eating disorder related attitudes, behaviours, and symptoms, c) to provide peer support and professional support online, and d) to refer individuals to regular professional healthcare if online support is not sufficient. These functions should allow for an early detection of eating disorder related impairment, early intervention via the Internet as well as timely access to regular care if necessary.

Via various dissemination channels (e.g., Internet, print media, social media, workshops), more than 100.000 young people have been informed about the ProYouth initiative in six European countries, more than 15.000 have used the online screening tools and more than 6.000 have registered to get full access to the information and support modules of the platform.

Findings confirm poor mental health literacy, shame, and stigmatization of eating disorders as barriers in the helpseeking process and point to the potential of the ProYouth platform in overcoming such barriers.