



## Amsterdam's pledge on Mental Health to the European Pillar of Social Rights, with regard to principles 3,16 & 20

### Why pledge on public mental health?

These extraordinary times we live in have had an immense impact on the lives of many of the inhabitants of the city of Amsterdam. The restrictions put in place to combat the coronavirus epidemic have affected everyone, and our citizens' mental wellbeing in specific. Due to the subsequent new reality of daily life, one in three Amsterdammers was experiencing psychosocial complaints, such as stress, anxiety or loneliness, in April 2020. Mental health, and specifically resilience, have been shown to be essential for coping with socio-psychological challenges that are part of our new reality. Mental health and resilience are essential for people to live healthy lives, and for children to grow up in good health. Recent research shows

that the mental wellbeing of young people in particular has suffered considerably since the outbreak of the coronavirus. It is therefore especially important to protect and strengthen the mental health of our residents in times of crises like these, and beyond.

### WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

#### MENTAL HEALTH 2016 vs 2020

61,000 Amsterdammers suffer from serious mental problems.

305,000 Amsterdammers suffer from moderate mental problems.

26% of people of Amsterdam feel more anxious in 2020 and 26% of people of Amsterdam feel lonelier than in 2016.



We as a city cannot fight the deterioration of mental wellbeing of our citizens alone. That is why we have initiated the movement: *Mental Health for Amsterdam called "Thrive"* by the end of 2019. This movement is aimed at promoting and strengthening mental health and resilience of all Amsterdammers. In order to do so we joined forces with our residents, researchers, healthcare professionals, policymakers, and people with personal experience with mental health issues. It is precisely this joint commitment that is important as a first step. Thereby, we want to contribute to a city in which welfare prevails and people can mentally thrive. As deputy mayor, I am pleased to act as a motivating force for this movement.

### Mental health problems are divided unevenly across the city

Like other public health problems, mental health issues are divided unevenly across the city (see figure next page). This also means that we as a city have to invest unevenly to reach equal chances for all our inhabitants. We enact this principle in several of our policy domains related to the European Pillar of Social Rights such as social support and welfare activities. We thereby strive for the highest levels of equity among all Amsterdammers.

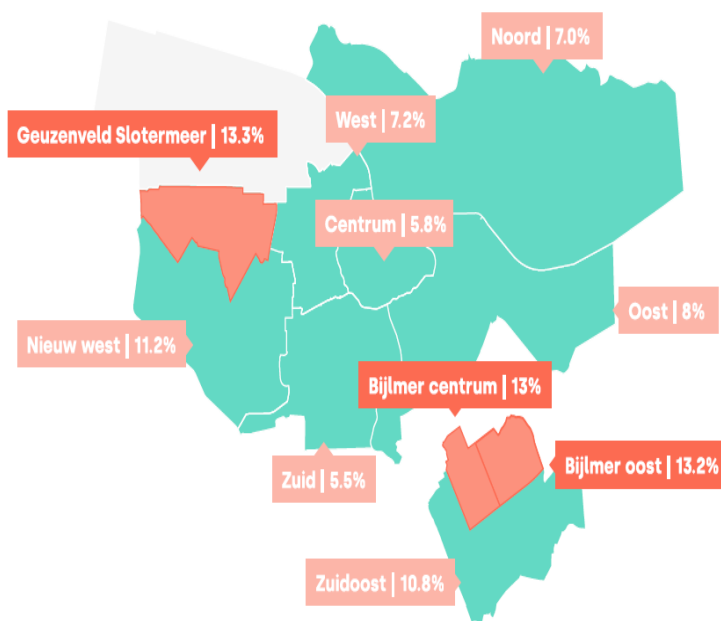


Figure 1 | The percentage of adults suffering from serious mental problems per district

**Table 1 | Percentage of residents aged 19 and older suffering from moderate psychological complaints, by district**

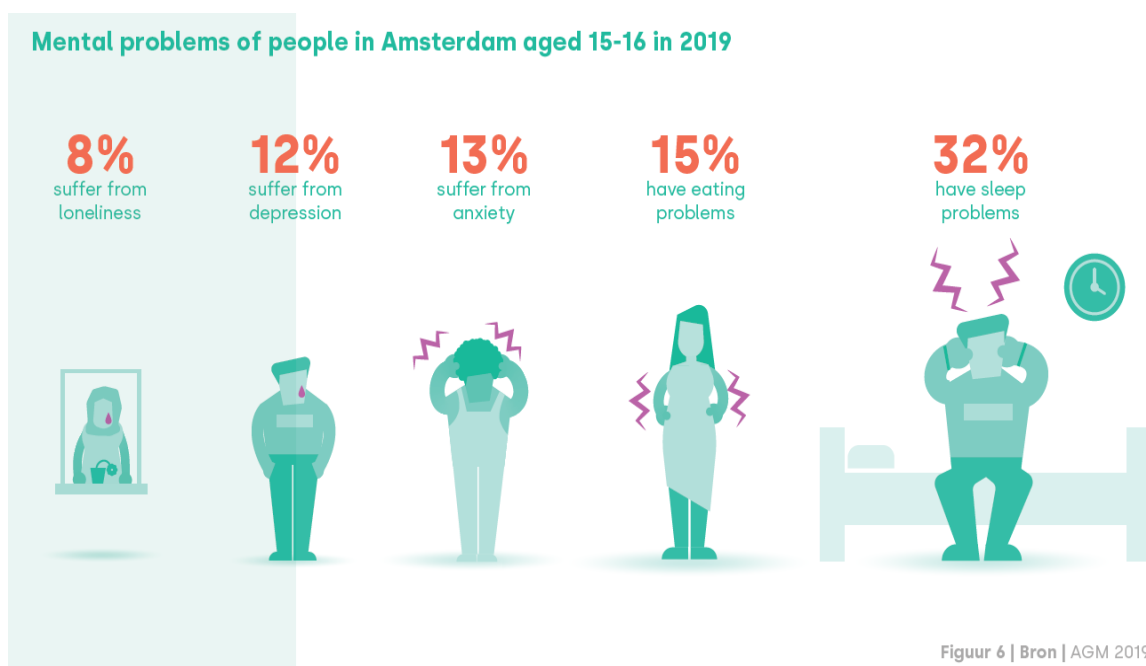
Year 2016	%
Centrum	40.9
West	41.7
Nieuw-west	41.6
Zuid	38.4
Oost	38.7
Noord	46.0
Zuidoost	41.2
Totaal	40.9

### What have we done so far?

*Thrive Mental Health for Amsterdam* offers all Amsterdammers tools in order for them to improve their self-efficacy and take action to improve their mental health. In addition, Thrive encourages mutual solidarity by stimulating Amsterdammers to provide support for the people around them. In our approach we focus on three groups: (1) young people, (2) Amsterdammers with a migration background, (3) and employers and business owners. To illustrate, hereby a few examples: *'Mental Health First Aid'*, a kind of first aid course for psychological problems, trains participants to recognize mental problems more quickly and to refer people to the right form of support where necessary. *'Gatekeeper Training'* focuses on strengthening the communication skills of professionals so they can support people who express suicidal thoughts and refer them for help where necessary. In total we have invested more than €1,6 million euros from late 2019 until late 2022.

Earlier investments in the mental resilience of young Amsterdammers, by identifying problems at an early stage and referring people to help where necessary, we can prevent a lot of mental

suffering among youth and contribute to a more resilient and healthier future. The second group, Amsterdammers with a migration background, experience a higher number of mental health problems on average than Amsterdammers without a migration background. They are underrepresented in healthcare and are less likely to participate in activities. By focusing on this group we strive to help them to be able to get the care they need. Finally, we focus on employers and business owners, because they too are increasingly dealing with the absence of personnel due to mental problems. We want to address this issue structurally in the workplace and increase employers' expertise, since mental health problems at the work place have a negative impact on peoples' lives.



### What have we learned?

The way in which Thrive is structured, the way of working, and its position within the municipal organization is different from most departments and programmes in the social domain. The flexibility and ability to respond quickly to questions from civil society have contributed to the development of Thrive and the disposition (of inhabitants, professionals, and policy makers) towards mental health.

- It involves all of society; we are all owners. This is why a top-down only approach (from government and GGZ institutions) will not be successful.
- The way we use language, including colour and imagery, strengthens the message and our prevention efforts, without labelling. We talk about mental struggles, melancholy, and anxiety, not depression or disorder. Communication is effective when we talk about stress, a dip, not feeling comfortable in your own skin, etc.

- Our unique position enables swift decision-making; it provides a lot of space for personal contribution and co-creation with residents and collaboration partners. Immediate action is taken when necessary.
- This is why the team of Thrive consists of staff members from different target groups, such as youngsters, experts through experience, clients, etc.

#### Our future ambition and goal:

We will stay committed to improve the mental health of our citizens and want to express our commitment by pledging to the European pillar of social rights. We will make a new plan in 2022 to keep working on this issue. Our ambition is as follows: By 2030, fewer Amsterdammers will be withdrawing from education, work or society as a result of mental problems. Amsterdam residents and professionals will have insight into factors that contribute to the development and promotion of resilience and mental health. They make use of these insights in both policy and implementation, at school, in the neighbourhood, in communities and organizations, and in plans and programs. Amsterdammers with mental health problems will experience a supportive environment.

We also want to showcase to our fellow cities in Eurocities and the EU in general that mental health is a serious public health issue that needs to be addressed. The pledge does not limit itself to the principle of health alone, because we as a city believe that equal opportunities and access to essential services are equally important to improve the mental health of our citizens and those in other cities.

We hope that the European institutions will help cities, especially with the upcoming year of mental health in 2023.



Sincerely, Simone Kukenheim  
Vice-mayor of Amsterdam public health

