



## Awareness of and attitudes towards depression in the European Parliament

*Depression is a serious and complex medical condition affecting more than 30 million Europeans. Many people believe they know what depression is and how to treat it, but the reality often surprises. The cost and impact of depression is often unknown and hence, depression does not receive the attention among policy makers that it deserves. In that respect, a survey<sup>1</sup> was held on the awareness of and attitudes towards depression among members of the European Parliament and their staff.*

The survey offered some striking findings. It showed that European parliamentarians are convinced of the seriousness of depression in the context of other major health issues, and that a majority believes that new legislation is required to address it effectively. The findings also revealed that MEPs and their staff underestimate the duration of an average episode of depression, the symptoms, the number of people in Europe who suffer from the disease, and the costs that it imposes on European businesses.



### What MEPs and their staff know

- Depression is disabling: respondents placed it second only to cancer among the most disabling health conditions;
- Depression is an important policy issue: on a one-to-ten scale, survey respondents gave depression a mean importance rating of 8.39 – again, second only to cancer, and ahead of heart disease, hypertension, and other circulatory problems;
- The most commonly recognised symptoms of depression: low moods and loss of interest in daily activities, each of which were cited by 92% of respondents.

**30million**  
EU citizens will suffer from depression at some point in their life



### What MEPs and their staff don't know

- The other symptoms of depression such as indecisiveness (cited by 53%) and forgetfulness (37%);
- The duration and life expectancy: only 21% of respondents correctly identified the average duration of a depression episode (three to six months), and a mere 10% correctly identified the expected average reduction in life expectancy of a depression sufferer (between six and ten years);
- The number of people suffering from depression in the EU: thought to number around 30 million;
- Economic and employment-related impacts: No respondent came close to estimating accurately how much depression costs European businesses annually in lost productivity. Five percent suggested that the total was €20 billion or higher – when the best estimates suggest that the true cost ranges from €77-100 billion.

Taken as a whole, the survey findings highlighted the need for multiple policy initiatives at various levels to raise awareness among stakeholders of the clinical, social and economic costs of depression and identify concrete steps to address its workplace productivity impact. Two-thirds of survey respondents believe that the EU should introduce legislation to protect the rights of employees suffering from depression.

<sup>1</sup>The survey was conducted by Ipsos Mori on behalf of the European Depression Association and sponsored by Lundbeck A/S. A total of 92 parliamentarians and staff responded, including 51 MEPs representing virtually all political groups and all parts of Europe.