

headspace Denmark

A volunteer based, low-threshold service for mental health support

Aims and Objectives

headspace Denmark is a free and anonymous counseling service for children and young people. Operating outside the formal healthcare system, it serves as a low-threshold "one-stop shop" designed to address mild-to-moderate mental health challenges before they escalate.

Implementation highlights

- **Volunteer-led workforce:** the primary counseling is delivered by trained volunteers, supported by a small number of paid youth counsellors and local center managers.
- **Bridge to Specialized Care:** when more specialised help is needed, the team supports the young person to access an external service such as a psychologist or social worker
- **Access:** support is implemented through walk-in centers. Access to the service may be self-initiated and is barrier-free: no need for a referral, no cost involved, and no waiting time.
- **Promotion:** headspace developed a set of outreach workshops to be delivered in schools, focussing on stress reduction, mental health awareness, self-esteem, and help-seeking behaviour.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** data is collected from young people and volunteers to continuously improve the offer and to stay up to date with trends in young people's needs. Periodically, external evaluations provide a more in-depth insight into the impact of headspace Denmark and experience of young people.

At a glance



Target audience

- Adolescents /young adults (12-25 years)
- Families



Delivery settings

- Walk-in centers
- Schools



Objectives

- Empower young people
- Prevention & promotion
- Early intervention
- De-stigmatization



Costs

In Denmark:

- Establishment costs: ~ €10,000
- Annual operating costs: ~ €200,000



Professionals involved

- Trained lay volunteers
- Mental health professionals
- Municipal employees



Leading organization:

Det Sociale Netværk



Countries

Inspired by service in Australia, adapted in Denmark, Norway, Iceland, the Netherlands, Ukraine.

How can this practice be implemented?

A [guide for implementation](#) is available. Key aspects include:

- partnerships with local municipalities and other services providing support to youth
- local culture of volunteerism
- training and supervision program for volunteer counsellors
- central, easily accessible venues designed to feel more like a "living room" than a clinic

Get started

- Find a full report [here](#), containing a detailed description of the model, reporting similar approaches in Europe and describing how to transfer this format
- Contact headspace Denmark at info@headspace.dk and find information on their [website](#)

Key takeaways

- ▶ Counseling delivered by trained lay volunteers
- ▶ Low-threshold access
- ▶ 100,000+ people supported



Supporting policies

- **10-year plan for psychiatry — En stærkere psykiatri (2022):** Includes a dedicated chapter on early intervention and prevention. Funding rises from DKK 3 million (2020) to DKK 1.107 billion from 2029 onwards on a permanent basis.
- **2024 Healthcare Reform:** Identifies "patient-oriented prevention" — including earlier identification of mental illness — as a central theme, providing a further policy anchor for low-threshold early intervention approaches.
- **Integrated Public-Private Partnerships:** each headspace centre is established through a formal agreement with the local municipality. This ensures that the local government contributes to funding and provides staff seconded from municipal and/or regional health services to support the volunteer workforce.



What makes this a good practice?

key features

- ▶ Successful model already transferred across countries
- ▶ Demonstrated effectiveness of a

lay counselor approach, providing valuable opportunity to increase access to support in settings with clinical workforce shortages

Impact: does it work?

Effectiveness

headspace Denmark's counselling shows positive impact on young people's mental health (1): 78% of young people experienced an improvement in their well being, and 61% felt they were better able to deal with their problems. The model significantly improves life satisfaction and reduces loneliness (1).

Efficiency

The model is recognized as a valuable, low-cost addition to traditional healthcare systems, largely due to its reliance on a trained volunteer workforce. The 2019 Rambøll evaluation (1) estimates that headspace may produce a net societal gain of up to €40,000 per center over five years.

Evidence base

An evaluation was conducted in 2019 (1), and in 2021 a pre/post evaluation was conducted using validated tools and feedback from over 3,700 young people (2). Another evaluation (pre-registered) is due to be completed in 2027 (3). Preliminary results show a statistically significant increase in wellbeing.

Reach: who can benefit?

Equity and access

headspace is a low-cost, low-intensity, easily accessible mental health support. It requires no referral, is open to all young people and has no cost to the young person.

Transferability and scalability

Inspired by a service of the same name in Australia, the Danish model is specifically highlighted as a successful transfer with adaptation such as shifting to the lay counsellor model. The Danish model was later transferred to Norway and Iceland through the Nordic headspace collaboration (4).

Integration: keeping it going and working across sectors

Sustainability

headspace is supported by a blended funding model (municipal contributions, national government support, philanthropic funding, and private partnerships). Funding from Danish government is currently confirmed until 2030 and has consistently been extended and expanded since the first commitment.

Intersectorality

Sectors involved are: health, education, social services and employment services. headspace centres collaborate directly with the health system, through local municipalities and regional health services, as well as other sectors involved in supporting young people's development (e.g. school workshops, local employers).

Engagement and innovation: listening to young people and adapting over time

Youth participation

headspace directly engages young people in the target group. The Youth Council helps ensure that young people have a voice throughout the organization and are included where decisions are made. Young people are also directly engaged as volunteers, alongside a broader volunteer workforce that includes people of all ages.

Intergenerational / life-course approach

headspace Denmark provides support to family members through the headspace Family program. Support includes individual counselling, family counselling and peer support sessions.

Research priorities and innovation

Task sharing: individuals without a background in child mental health can be trained to deliver mental health care effectively. Task-sharing can be done with individuals with and without clinical backgrounds, including youth lay counsellors.

References and additional tools to favour translation

1. Rambøll Management Consulting . Evaluering Af Headspace. Virkninger for Den Enkelte Og for Samfundet. Hannemanns Allé, København S: Rambøll. (2019)
2. A low-intensity, low-cost model for youth mental health the headspace Denmark approach. Report 2025
3. Bjørkedal ST, Christensen TN, Poulsen RM, Ranning A, Thorup AA, Nordentoft M, Bojesen AB, Hastrup LH, Ustrup M, Eplov LF. Study protocol: an effectiveness, cost-effectiveness, and process evaluation of headspace Denmark. *Frontiers in Public Health*. 2025 Apr 7;13:1491756.
4. <https://headspace.dk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/headspace-Nordic-a4.pdf>