

## Statement on Mental Well-being and the Rights of Persons with Cerebral Palsy

Mental health challenges are common among people with cerebral palsy (CP). Beyond physical limitations, barriers to participation often lead to loneliness, social exclusion, and psychological distress. Across the Nordic countries, these challenges persist, despite the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)*, which guarantees the right to the highest attainable standard of health, equality, non-discrimination, accessibility, and full participation.

Health systems often lack the expertise and infrastructures to address CP as a lifelong condition – let alone its mental health impacts. At the threshold of adulthood, specialized healthcare services for people with CP often come to an end. Young people are customarily left to navigate general healthcare systems on their own, that lack CP-specific expertise at a critical stage of life. Furthermore, this lack of expertise may persist throughout their lifespans. In primary care, CP itself and its many associated symptoms – such as chronic pain and fatigue – are often not recognized or properly treated and may instead be misdiagnosed and managed as depression.

A particular concern is secondary disability: Cerebral palsy may lead to a decline in functional ability in adulthood. For example, a person who previously walked independently may later require mobility aids such as a wheelchair. Such transitions can undermine self-worth and affect autonomy and identity; however systematic psychological support is rarely offered.

Cuts to re/habilitation services or insufficient access to therapy further lead to a decline in functional ability, even when this could have been prevented. Preventive CP care is largely absent, and accessibility challenges often prevent people with CP from attending standard preventive screenings offered to the general population.

Uncertainty in society further exacerbates the problem. When people with disabilities face hesitation, exclusion, and discrimination in daily life, it undermines their self-worth, mental health, and quality of life. Families also carry a heavy burden, with limited assistance, fragmented systems, and inadequate legal protection. It is also worth noting that very little research has been conducted on mental health or mental well-being of individuals with CP.



CP NORDEN 2025

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participation  
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## Key Challenges

- Absence of specialized adult healthcare and CP expertise.
- Misdiagnosis and untreated health issues due to insufficient knowledge.
- Missed preventive health services and unequal access across regions.
- Decline in personal assistance programs and difficulty accessing support.
- Lack of cognitive follow-up and information across the lifespan.
- Documented discrimination in education, employment, and healthcare.
- Families experiencing stress and poor health due to lack of adequate support

## Demands

1. Better access to healthcare – preventive, rehabilitative, and mental health services without discrimination.
2. Specialized knowledge – professionals trained on CP-specific needs across all life stages.
3. Accessibility guaranteed – clinics, communication, and services must be open to all.
4. Mental health as core CP care – integrate screening and psychological services.
5. Support during transitions – especially when services end at adulthood or when functional decline occurs.
6. Support for families – legal safeguards and resources to strengthen their role.
7. Combat discrimination – in healthcare, education, work, and community life.
8. Participation in decision-making – people with CP must be involved in shaping policy and services.

**The CRPD makes clear that mental well-being, equality, non-discrimination, accessibility, and participation are fundamental human rights. People with CP across the Nordic countries deserve to live with dignity, autonomy, and flourish – physically, mentally, and socially.**

**We call on all Nordic governments to adopt, fund, and enforce policies that guarantee these rights, ensuring no one with CP is left behind.**

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