

PRESS RELEASE

MHADIE

A new framework for supporting health and disability policy development in Europe

The Italian National Neurological Institute Carlo Besta is the coordinator of innovative European research involving leading international researchers that will allow the European Union to propose to its member countries a new model for disability policy within both health and social contexts.

The kick-off meeting of **MHADIE (Measuring Health and Disability in Europe: supporting policy development)** took place at the National Neurological Institute C. Besta in Milan on **Friday 4 and Saturday 5 March 2005**.

This project is of great interest to those concerned with health and disability issues, as well as the larger scientific community. As **Dr Matilde Leonardi** from the **Scientific Direction** of the Institute, leader of the research group **Public Health, Disability and ICF** and coordinator of this important European project, puts it: *“For the first time health and disability issues are approached not merely from a narrow clinical perspective but from one in which environmental, psychological and quality of life aspects of the total lived experience are also taken into account. Understanding how to respond to the needs of people with disabilities means understanding how to influence social and economic policies as well as designing specific tools to combat discrimination and promote social integration and participation, thus enhancing opportunities.”*

The World Health Organisation’s ICF (International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health) provides a new framework for conceptualising health and disability and will be tested by a group of scientists and researchers from 14 European Union Countries. This study will should yield important results for medical care and social integration, especially for the production of disability statistics.

The universal approach embodied in the ICF is a major paradigm shift in our understanding of disability, one that emphasizes the need to integrate individual functioning with the complete physical and social environment, incorporating the full lived experience disability and linking together health and social participation issues policy concerns. The project will develop policy recommendations and guidelines that Italy and the rest of the European Union will be able to use for their policy planning and development.

In this 3-year project Italy will play a leading role as the coordinating country. In addition, the Labour and Welfare Ministry of Italy is implementing a pilot project “ICF and Labour Policies” that is developing a new approach to work related issues as they apply to people with disabilities and which is currently being tested in 25 provinces throughout all regions of the country.

MHADIE will develop a framework to influence and support new European policy guidelines on health and disability through statistical, clinical and experimental research, and will use ICF as a cross-cutting universal framework and international standard.

Among the partners of the research group “Public Health, Disability and ICF” led by Dr Matilde Leonardi from the Scientific Direction of the National Neurological Institute C. Besta are the **World Health Organization**, the **European Federation of Neurological Associations** and leading world experts in health and social policy and ICF from **Spain, Slovenia, Switzerland, Sweden, Rumania, Ireland, Germany, Czech Republic** as well as the **Family and Social Solidarity Department of Regione Lombardia**, the **Regional Health Agency of Regione Friuli Venezia Giulia**, **Don Gnocchi Foundation**, **CF Consulting** and the **Disability Italian Network (DIN)**.