

When Adolescents with Mental Health Conditions Become Adults

AIHTA Report Analyses International Models and Identifies Policy Options for Transitional Psychiatry in Austria

Vienna, 29 January 2026 – Around one in four young people aged 10 to 18 in Austria is affected by a mental health condition. According to expert estimates, almost half of all patients receiving care in child and adolescent psychiatry will require ongoing care in adult mental health services. The transition from child and adolescent to adult mental health services represents a critical phase that is frequently marked by interruptions or discontinuation of care. A recent review by the Austrian Institute for Health Technology Assessment (AIHTA) analyses international models of transitional psychiatry and outlines policy options for Austria.

“Continuity of care during the transition period is crucial for the course and outcome of mental health disorders or conditions,” says Romy Schönegger, lead author of the study. However, only a small number of countries have developed standards and strategies specifically for transition. Internationally, two main approaches can be identified. In the United Kingdom, for example, coordination models seek to strengthen collaboration between child and adolescent mental health services and adult mental health services. Australia and Denmark, by contrast, have focused on establishing youth-specific services that provide age-appropriate care outside traditional service structures.

“No single model can be regarded as inherently superior,” Schönegger emphasises. “What matters is a flexible, needs-based approach that takes account of the developmental, clinical and psychosocial needs of adolescents and young adults, while also reflecting local resources and population needs.”

Recommendations for Austria

Since 2024, patients in Austria have had the option to continue receiving care in child and adolescent psychiatry beyond the age of 18. According to experts, however, implementation is often limited by insufficient staffing resources.

“There is no international best-practice model that Austria could simply replicate. Nevertheless, international evidence points to several promising policy options,” Schönegger concludes. Foremost among these is the need for a national strategy for transitional psychiatry, embedded within a broader framework for strengthening the mental health of young people and supported by adequate resources.

Such a strategy should be developed in collaboration with young people with lived experience of mental health services and their families and should not rely on rigid age thresholds. Instead, it should be guided by the individual's clinical trajectory, developmental stage and readiness for transition.

"A structured transition process requires coordination, monitoring and the reliable exchange of data and information," explains the study author. "It should also adopt a holistic approach by involving primary care and strengthening cooperation with the education and employment sectors."

Other essential components include psychoeducation programmes, communication strategies aimed at reducing the stigma associated with mental illness, and ongoing research and evaluation.

"The evidence suggests that early and structured transition planning can improve continuity of care and can reduce negative outcomes," Schönegger concludes. "Implementing such processes is therefore a key step towards further developing psychiatric care for young people in Austria."

About the Report

The report "Schönegger R., Hidaka Y. (2025): Transitional Psychiatry: Analysis of International Models and Policy Recommendations for Austria. HTA Project Report 177" is available at: <https://eprints.aihta.at/1574/>

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