



11.3. Waiting time for a first face-to-face contact in a centre for ambulatory mental health (MH-3)

11.3.1. Documentation sheet

Description	Waiting time for a first face-to-face contact in a centre for ambulatory mental health
Calculation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of days a patient has to wait for an intake assessment in a centre for ambulatory mental health; • Number of days a patient has to wait for a second contact with a centre for ambulatory mental health.
Rationale	<p>Long waiting times are an important indication for accessibility problems. Moreover, excessive wait times may contribute to clinical deterioration and increased risk for suicide or hospitalisation. ¹ Furthermore, the longer the wait, the less likely patients and families are to attend appointments. ² Therefore, timeliness of access to mental health services can be considered as a key indicator in calls for improvement of the mental health care system.</p> <p>In Belgium, the competencies for mental healthcare services, because of several political agreements about state reforms, are not homogeneously organised at the level of the public authorities (e.g. the federal government is responsible for the payment of psychiatrists and psychiatric wards in acute hospitals while the federated entities are responsible for the organisation and payment of centres for ambulatory mental health care). Because of these scattered competencies, no standardized data sources exist that cover the entire mental health services system. Moreover, the self-employed clinical psychologists were covered nor by the Federal nor by the federated competency levels until the end of 2018; in 2019, a limited number of psychological consultations should be reimbursed at the federal level for 18-64 years old patientsⁱⁱⁱ.</p> <p>As such, problems arise when it is an objective to monitor waiting times for access to the mental healthcare systems. A second best option is to monitor the waiting times for one type of service. In this report, we use the data published by the Flemish Agency of Care about waiting times for the centres for ambulatory mental healthcare. There are 20 such centres in Flanders. They have to submit twice year a set of data based on their electronic patient records (two different systems in use since 2007).</p>
Data source	Agentschap voor zorg en gezondheid: Cijfers Centra voor Geestelijke Gezondheidszorg ³
International comparability	No international comparison available
Dimension	Accessibility (accessibility mental health services)
Related performance indicators	Percentage of visits to the Emergency Rooms in general hospitals for mental health and/or substance- related problems Suicide rates

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.deblock.belgium.be/fr/le-remboursement-des-soins-psychologiques-pour-les-adultes-est-une-premi%C3%A8re-%C3%A9tape-vers-un>



11.3.2. Results (Flanders)

The **waiting time for a first contact** with an ambulatory mental health centre was <1 month for 56% of all patients in 2017. Another 22% of the patients had to wait between 1 and 2 months, i.e. 22% had to wait more than 2 months. In 2009, 70% of the patients were seen within a month and only 13% had to wait more than 2 months. In 2017, clients for child and

adolescent mental health services had to wait for 66 days on average, more than 2 weeks longer than other clients, with 1 out of 4 clients waiting more than 68 days for a first contact; mentally disabled had to wait for 96 days on average (more than 6 extra weeks). Elderly got their first contact with 25 days on average (Table 106).

For the **second contact** (usually start of treatment), the proportion of patients seen within a month decreased from 66% in 2009 to 60% in 2017.

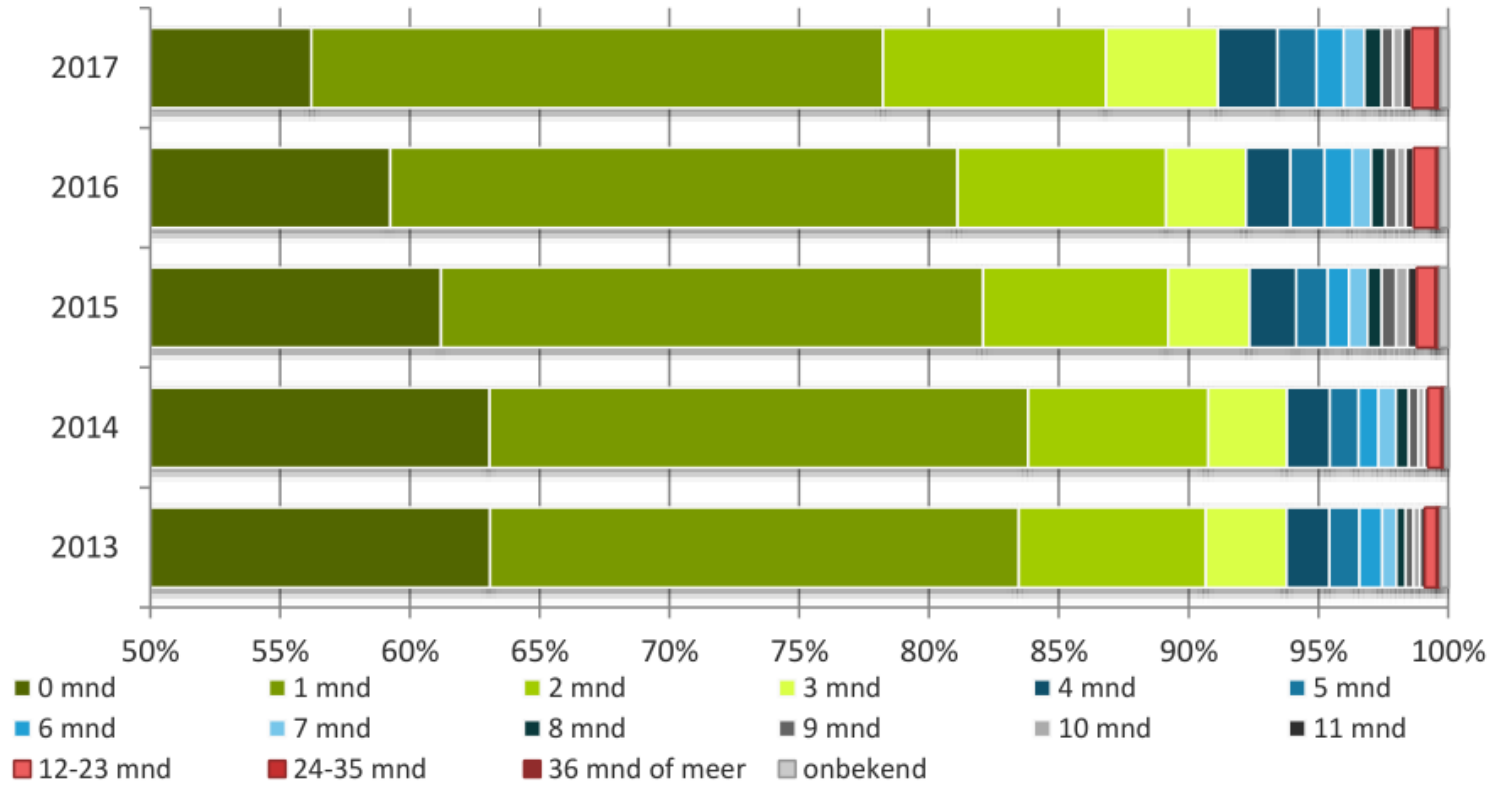
Table 106 – Waiting time for ambulatory mental health centres in Flanders (2009-2017)

Year of intake= year of registration	Waiting time until first contact									Waiting time after first contact									
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	
unknown	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
0 month	70%	66%	66%	65%	63%	63%	61%	59%	56%	66%	65%	64%	61%	61%	61%	62%	60%	60%	
1 month	17%	19%	18%	20%	20%	21%	21%	22%	22%	18%	19%	18%	20%	20%	20%	20%	19%	19%	
2 months	5%	7%	6%	7%	7%	7%	7%	8%	9%	7%	7%	7%	7%	7%	7%	7%	7%	7%	
3 months	2%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	4%	3%	3%	3%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	
4 months	1%	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	
5 months	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	
6 months	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	
7 months	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	
8 months	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	
9 months	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%	
10 months	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	
11 months	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	
12-23 months	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	
24-35 months	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	
36 months or more	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	
All files	28 475	28 393	28 582	29 480	30 061	29 407	29 959	30 050	29 174	21 277	21 182	21 190	21 679	21 950	22 019	22 358	22 377	21 095	

Source: EPD 2009-2017³



Figure 159 – Waiting time for ambulatory mental health centres in Flanders, first contact (2013-2017)



Source: EPD 2013-2017³



Table 107 – Waiting time for first contact in ambulatory mental healthcare centres in Flanders, by type of care (2017)

Zorgsoort	aantal zorgperiodes	gemiddelde wachttijd	75% van cliënten moet maximaal ... dagen wachten
Alle zorgsoorten	29.083	50	53
Kinder- en jeugdzorg	6.422	66	68
Volwassenenzorg	11.969	53	60
Ouderenzorg	1.961	25	30
Verslavingszorg	2.738	47	48
Forensische zorg	2.736	40	39
Zorg verstandelijk gehandicapten	164	96	135

Source: EPD registration data, 2017³

Key points

- **Data about waiting times for mental health services are not systematically collected for the entire Belgian mental healthcare system. Only data for waiting times to access Flemish ambulatory mental health centres are publicly available.**
- **Almost half of patients have to wait 1 month or more on a first contact (44% in 2017), a percentage that increased over time (30% in 2009).**
- **On average waiting times are longest for mentally disabled mental healthcare services, and shortest for elderly services.**

References

1. Williams ME, Latta J, Conversano P. Eliminating the wait for mental health services. *J Behav Health Serv Res.* 2008;35(1):107-14.
2. Sherman ML, Barnum DD, Buhman-Wiggs A, Nyberg E. Clinical intake of child and adolescent consumers in a rural community mental health center: does wait-time predict attendance? *Community Ment Health J.* 2009;45(1):78-84.
3. Agentschap Zorg en Gezondheid. Cijfers Centra voor Geestelijke Gezondheidszorg [Web page]. Brussels [cited 08/02/2019]. Available from: <https://www.zorg-en-gezondheid.be/cijfers-centra-voor-geestelijke-gezondheidszorg>