



# Public Mental Health Today

A handbook

Edited by Isabella Goldie

**Mental Health** Foundation



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## Chapter 2

# Understanding mental health

Gregor Henderson

## Introduction

Understanding mental health is complex. Anyone picking up this book will know that either before or certainly after reading it. So it's a daunting task to deal with this complexity in a single chapter. However, this chapter aims to give an outline and basic introduction into some of the current thinking on understanding mental health from which further questions, lines of inquiry, debate and discussion, can flow, as well as to provide some context for the chapters that follow.

This chapter concentrates on understanding mental 'health' as part of public or population mental health and is therefore not about understanding 'mental illness, mental disorders or mental health problems'. There are of course links and connections, and I will allude to these in the chapter. The understanding of mental illness is also a complex and dynamic area that has changed and developed significantly over the last 50 years or so and deserves a separate body of work in itself. But that work is not contained here.

This chapter is naturally selective, but aims to cover some of the key areas for consideration in understanding mental health. A summary of the key points in the chapter is included. References and other helpful resource materials are also provided.

Any omissions, inaccuracies or unhelpful interpretations are mine alone for which I take full responsibility. As it is my own mental health, my genetic inheritance, upbringing, background, family, economic and material

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