

# WHO events addressing public health priorities

## Committing to action: mental health in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

### No health without mental health

Mental health is an integral part of health and well-being, and in May 2012 the World Health Assembly acknowledged this fact by requesting the Director-General to develop a comprehensive mental health action plan, in consultation with Member States, covering services, policies, legislation, plans, strategies and programmes. The resulting global action plan, adopted by the Assembly in 2013, takes a multisectoral approach across the life course to promote mental well-being, prevent mental disorders, provide care, enhance recovery, promote human rights and reduce the mortality, morbidity and disability for persons with mental disorders.

### Scaling up mental health action in the Region

The Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020 has set out a clear road map for all stakeholders with agreed-upon targets and indicators. It provides the foundation for the development of a regional framework for action to scale up mental health in the Region.

To chart the way forward in consultation with Member States for a regional framework to scale up action on mental health in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, in line with the Action Plan 2013–2020, a meeting was held in Cairo, Egypt from 15 to 17 September, 2014. The participants included mental health focal points from Member States supported by experts who had, in preparation for the meeting, developed evidence briefs on priority areas to guide the drafting of the regional framework and to facilitate discussions.

The meeting had the following specific objectives:

- Review currently available resources & capacities in the Region, and identify the main facilitators and barriers to implementing the provisions of the Action Plan and a regional strategy.
- Review the best available evidence and practices for addressing priority mental health needs.
- Agree on a regional framework for action based on the global action plan and priority next steps for scaling up national action on mental health.

### Key areas of focus

The meeting programme was organized around the key domains, broadly mirroring the objectives of the Comprehensive Action Plan 2013–2020: governance; health care; promotion and prevention; and surveillance, monitoring and research.

The following major issues/challenges were identified.

1. Governance
  - Financial protection of families and persons suffering from mental health conditions from sliding into poverty
  - Availability of transitional/bridge funding for reorganization of mental health services from institutional to community-based
  - Involvement & empowerment of user/family associations in developing and implementing policies, legislation and services
2. Health care
  - Premature closure of mental hospitals, without parallel development of community services
  - Organization of services based on the delineated catchments
  - Enhancement of a mental health component in pre-service teaching /training needs of health professionals as opposed to the current reliance on in-service training
  - Deinstitutionalization by changing attitudes and dismantling the culture of institutionalization of mentally ill persons rather than just reducing beds.
3. Mental health and psychosocial support in humanitarian emergencies
  - Embedding of a mental health and psychosocial support component in emergency preparedness
4. Promotion and prevention
  - Ensuring buy in from other sectors---what will be their gain
  - Step-based approach to prevention and promotion, focusing on actions the health sector can directly influence, such as recognition and management of maternal postnatal depression, parenting skill training and nutritional interventions, expanding gradually to other sectors, e.g. education, poverty reduction
  - Expansion of the scope of prevention to include early recognition and management of childhood disorders
  - Availability of packages targeted at specific groups, e.g. adolescents, women, refugees
5. Surveillance, monitoring and research
  - Cultural sensitivity about suicidal behaviours, while strengthening vital statistics registration systems to capture suicide-related deaths
  - Paucity of research, in general, and implementation research, in particular, to guide policy and service developments
  - Capacity for undertaking research
  - Regional consortium for research into emergencies.

## Box 1: Strategic interventions to scale up action on mental health in the Region

### **Governance**

- Establish/update a multisectoral national policy/strategic action plan for mental health in line with international/regional human rights instruments
- Establish a common governance structure, as appropriate to the national context, to facilitate and monitor implementation of the multisectoral national policy/strategic action plan
- Review legislation related to mental health in line with international human rights covenants/ instruments.
- Establish a mechanism to independently monitor the implementation of updated legislation
- Include defined priority mental conditions in the basic health delivery package of the government and social/private insurance reimbursement schemes
- Increase and prioritize budgetary allocations for addressing the agreed-upon service targets and priorities, including providing transitional/bridge funding

### **Health care**

- Establish mental health services in general hospitals for outpatient and short-stay inpatient care
- Integrate delivery of evidence-based interventions for priority mental conditions in primary health care, supported by referral systems
- Integrate delivery of interventions for mental health conditions into priority health programmes
- Enable people with mental health conditions and their families through self-help and community-based interventions
- Down-size the existing long-stay mental hospitals and ensure protection of the rights of people with mental health condition
- Embed mental health and psychosocial support in national emergency preparedness, also ensuring strengthening of mental health systems as part of recovery
- Train emergency responders to provide psychological first aid
- Strengthen the capacity of health professionals for recognition and management of priority mental conditions during emergencies
- Implement evidence-informed interventions for psychosocial assistance to vulnerable groups

### **Promotion and prevention**

- Integrate recognition and management of maternal depression and parenting skills training in maternal and child health programmes
- Integrate life skills education (LSE), using a whole school approach
- Reduce access to means of suicide
- Employ evidence-based methods to improve mental health literacy and reduce stigma

### **Surveillance, monitoring and research**

- Integrate the core indicators within the national health information systems
- Routinely record and report suicides at the national level
- Enhance the national capacity to undertake prioritized research
- Engage stakeholders in research planning, implementation and dissemination

## **The way forward for mental health in the Region**

Following the three days of deliberations, the framework based on the principles underpinning the comprehensive action plan was modified to capture the needs and priorities of

the Member States of the Region (see Box 1 for the strategic intervention proposed in the regional framework).

The next step is for each country to begin working on prioritizing the strategic interventions agreed upon in the regional framework and monitoring their progress using

the set of proposed indicators. A deliberate and concerted effort will be needed to actively involve all stakeholders, from decision-makers to the users of services in order to achieve vision of the action plan of a world in which mental health is promoted and protected and mental disorders are prevented,

and persons affected by these disorders are able to exercise the full range of human rights, participate fully in society and at work free from stigmatization and discrimination and access high quality, culturally-appropriate health and social care in a timely way to promote recovery.

Domains	Strategic interventions	Proposed indicators
<b>Governance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish/update a multisectoral national policy/strategic action plan for mental health</li> <li>Embed mental health and psychosocial support in national emergency preparedness and recovery plans</li> <li>Review legislation related to mental health in line with international human rights covenants/ instruments</li> <li>Integrate priority mental conditions in the basic health delivery package of the government and social/private insurance reimbursement schemes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Country has an operational multisectoral national mental health policy/plan in line with international/regional human rights instruments<sup>a</sup></li> <li>Mental health and psychosocial support provision is integrated in the national emergency preparedness plans</li> <li>Country has updated mental health legislation in line with international/regional human rights instruments</li> <li>Inclusion of specified priority mental health conditions in basic packages of health care of public and private insurance/ reimbursement schemes</li> <li>Enhanced budgetary allocations are in place for addressing the agreed upon national mental health service delivery targets</li> </ul>
<b>Health care</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish mental health services in general hospitals for outpatient and short-stay inpatient care</li> <li>Integrate delivery of cost-effective, feasible and affordable evidence-based interventions for mental conditions in primary health care and other priority health programmes<sup>b</sup></li> <li>Provide people with mental health conditions and their families with access to self-help and community-based interventions.</li> <li>Downsize the existing long-stay mental hospitals</li> <li>Implement best practices for mental health and psychosocial support in emergencies<sup>c</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proportion of general hospitals which have mental health units, including inpatient and outpatient units</li> <li>Proportion of persons with mental health conditions utilizing health services (disaggregated by age, sex, diagnosis and setting)</li> <li>Proportion of primary health care facilities with regular availability of essential psychotropic medicines</li> <li>Proportion of primary health care facilities with at least one staff trained to deliver non-pharmacological interventions</li> <li>Proportion of mental health facilities monitored annually to ensure protection of human rights of persons with mental conditions using quality and rights standards</li> <li>Proportion of health care workers trained in recognition and management of priority mental conditions during emergencies</li> </ul>
<b>Promotion and prevention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide cost-effective, feasible and affordable preventive interventions through community and population-based platforms<sup>d</sup></li> <li>Train emergency responders to provide psychological first aid</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proportion of schools implementing the whole-school approach to promote life skills</li> <li>Proportion of mother and child health care personnel trained in providing early childhood care and development and parenting skills to mothers and families</li> <li>Proportion of mother and child health care personnel trained in early recognition and management of maternal depression</li> <li>Availability of operational national suicide prevention action plan</li> <li>Regular national campaigns to improve mental health literacy and reduce stigma using multiple delivery channels</li> <li>Psychological first aid (PFA) training is incorporated in all emergency responder trainings at national level</li> </ul>
<b>Surveillance, monitoring and research</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integrate the core indicators within the national health information systems</li> <li>Enhance the national capacity to undertake prioritized research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Routine data and reports at national level available on the core set of mental health indicators</li> <li>Annual reporting of national data on numbers of deaths by suicide</li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup>**Operational:** refers to a policy, strategy or action plan which is being used and implemented in the country, with resources and funding available to implement it with a unit /department which has a specifically delineated budget, human resource allocation and authority to monitor the implementation of the policy/strategy in the country.

<sup>b</sup>**Cost-effective, feasible and affordable evidence-based interventions (“best buys”) for management of mental disorders include:** treatment of epilepsy (with older first-line antiepileptic drugs), depression (with generic antidepressant drugs and psychosocial treatment), bipolar disorder (with the mood-stabilizer drug lithium), and schizophrenia (with older antipsychotic drugs and psychosocial treatment). However, there are a number of interventions for management of mental disorders starting in childhood and adolescence, anxiety and stress-related disorders and suicidal behaviours which can be classified as **“good buys”** and which are also part of the mhGAP intervention guide (mhGAP-IG) [http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/mhgap/en/](http://www.who.int/mental_health/mhgap/en/).

<sup>c</sup>**Best and good practices for mental health and psychosocial support in emergencies include:** strengthen community self-help and social support; support early childhood development (ECD) activities; train and supervise staff in the management of mental health problems that are relevant to emergencies; provide evidence-based psychological interventions through lay workers; ensure regular supply of essential psychotropic medications; address the safety, basic needs and rights of people with severe or chronic mental illness in the community and institutions; encourage dissemination of information to the community at large.

<sup>d</sup>**Best practices (cost-effective, feasible and affordable evidence-based interventions) for prevention of mental disorders and promotion of mental health include:** early child development and parenting skills interventions and laws and regulations to restrict access to means of self-harm/suicide. Mass information and awareness campaigns for promoting mental health literacy and reducing stigma; early recognition and management of maternal depression; identification, case detection and management in schools of children with mental, neurological and substance use (MNS) disorders; integrating mental health promotion strategies, such as stress reduction, into occupational health and safety policies; regulations to improve obstetric and perinatal care, strengthening immunization; salt iodization programmes; folic acid food fortification; and selective protein supplementation programmes to promote healthy cognitive development are recommended as **“good practices”**