



Briefing

Mental Health for Sustainable Development: The Role of iNGOs

Executive statement

“Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

-World Health Organization: Strengthening Our Response¹

A 2014 report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Global Health made four recommendations on how the United Kingdom (UK) could harness its unique expertise and resources to address the global burden of mental, neurological, and substance use (MNS) disorders,² currently the leading cause of years lost due to disability worldwide.³ Among these was a recommendation to mobilise international non-governmental organisations (iNGOs) to both integrate mental health into existing development programmes and create new, mental health-specific programmes. With the inclusion of mental health in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals,⁴ there is a need to revisit this recommendation and define a call to action for iNGOs. On 22 February 2016, a meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Global Health, co-organised by the Mental Health Innovation Network, will bring together Parliamentarians and representatives from over 30 international organisations to:

- Review what iNGOs are accomplishing in global mental health
- Discuss the impact of mental health on global health and development priorities
- Explore solutions to promote inclusion of people living with MNS disorders by iNGO programmes

There has never before been an international, coordinated iNGO response to address the global burden of MNS disorders. Findings from this meeting will inform a call to action to be released in advance of the upcoming event *Out of the Shadows: Making Mental Health a Global Priority*, co-hosted by the World Bank and World Health Organization (WHO) in Washington, D.C. this April, 2016.⁵

Agenda: 22 February 2016 (16:30-18:30)

The meeting and networking reception will be held in Committee Room 4 of the Palace of Westminster. Participants are expected to enter via the Cromwell Green Visitors' Entrance.

16:30	<i>Opening Remarks</i>	Rt Hon Norman Lamb, MP
16:35	<i>Presentations</i>	Jess McQuail , BasicNeeds International Mark Jordans , War Child Holland Inka Weissbecker , International Medical Corps Julian Eaton , CBM International
17:15	<i>Panel Discussion</i>	<i>[Participants invited to pose questions]</i>
17:45	<i>Ballot and Closing Remarks</i>	Lord Nigel Crisp KCB
18:05	<i>Networking Reception</i>	<i>[Participants networking in Committee Room 4]</i>

Key messages

- Mental health is a critical component of physical health and development that has for too long been overlooked in national and international agendas
- Governments are committing to tackle the burden of MNS disorders via the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and 2013-2020 World Health Organization Mental Health Action Plan
- Evidence-based, cost-effective mental health innovations exist, but require commitment by development partners including iNGOs in order to achieve impact at scale

The problem

Mental health is a critical component of physical health and development

Evidence suggests a cyclical relationship between poverty and mental illness: people living in poverty are more likely to develop mental illness; people living with mental illness are more likely to descend into poverty.⁶ Mental illness will cost the global economy US \$16.1 trillion in lost economic output in 2030, more than three times the cost of output lost to cancer.⁷ By 2020 depression will become the second leading cause of disability worldwide.⁸

“Mental illnesses are killer diseases. They need to take their place among other killer diseases for investment and priority.”

-Graham Thornicroft, Professor of Community Psychiatry, King's College London²

While mental illness can increase disease risk, physical illness can also increase risk of mental illness.⁹ The results can be deadly. Among patients with physical health problems such as HIV or heart disease, those who also have a mental illness are more likely to die prematurely.¹⁰ In the general population, individuals with mental disorders are more than twice as likely to die from any cause; the high mortality rate cannot be attributed to suicide alone.¹¹

Mental health in low- and middle-income countries is often overlooked

Low- and middle-income countries are home to the majority of the world's population, yet up to 90% of people living with mental illness in these countries do not receive mental health services.¹² One of the biggest reasons behind this “treatment gap” is underinvestment. Low-income countries spend less than 1% of their health budgets on mental health, while less than 1% of global development funding for health is spent on mental health.^{13,14} Mental health is a global issue that affects all other sectors and must be integrated into national and international health and development programmes to ensure that no one is left behind.

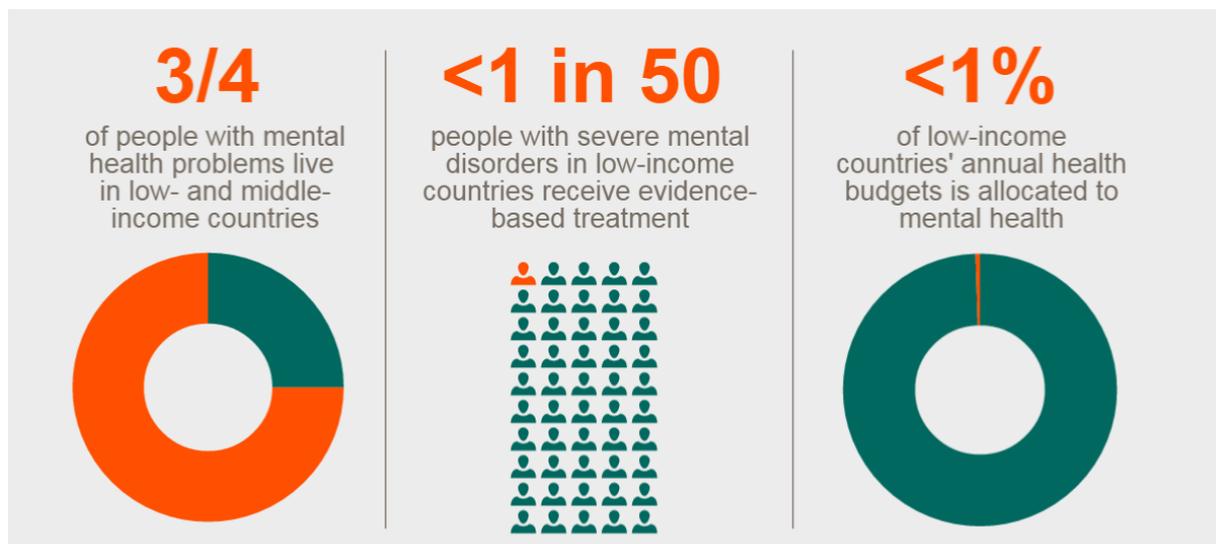


Figure 1. Adapted from 2014 All-Party Parliamentary Group Report: Mental Health for Sustainable Development²

Growing international commitment

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and World Health Organization Mental Health Action Plan highlight mental health as an emerging global priority.

The 2000-2015 Millennium Development Goals shaped an international development agenda that attracted nearly US \$36 billion for global health in the year 2014 alone.¹⁵ The inclusion of mental health in targets 3.4 and 3.5 of the 2016-2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the ratification by all member states of the World Health Organization 2013-2020 Mental Health Action Plan are important milestones which require a coordinated global response.^{4,16}

Sustainable Development Goal 3: Health and Well-Being Mental Health Targets⁴

Target 3.4: By 2020, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable disease through prevention and treatment and **promote mental health and well-being.**

Target 3.5: Strengthen the **prevention and treatment of substance abuse**, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol.

“To promote physical and mental health and well-being and to extend life expectancy for all, we must achieve universal health coverage and access to quality health care. No one must be left behind.”

-Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development⁴

The crucial role of iNGOs

Non-governmental organisations will play a crucial role in tackling the SDGs

The 2014 All-Party Parliamentary Group Report on Mental Health for Sustainable Development highlighted the important role that iNGOs can play in expanding access to services for people with mental health problems, by either launching new mental health programmes, integrating mental health interventions into complementary programmes, or monitoring and evaluating whether people living with mental health problems are benefitting from existing programmes.²

As governments turn their attention to SDGs, iNGOs may discover that mental health is becoming an increasingly prominent topic in the public-private partnerships, technical working groups and Ministry secondments of which they are already a part. iNGOs with the expertise and influence to support governments in scaling up mental health services are sorely needed.

Evidence-based, cost-effective interventions do exist

“NGOs and others working in international development should... **understand the needs and capacities** of people with mental health problems, **encourage the inclusion** of people with mental disorders in their general development programmes, **set up new mental health-specific programmes**, and **measure the impact** of their programmes on mental health.”

-2014 All-Party Parliamentary Group Report: Mental Health for Sustainable Development²

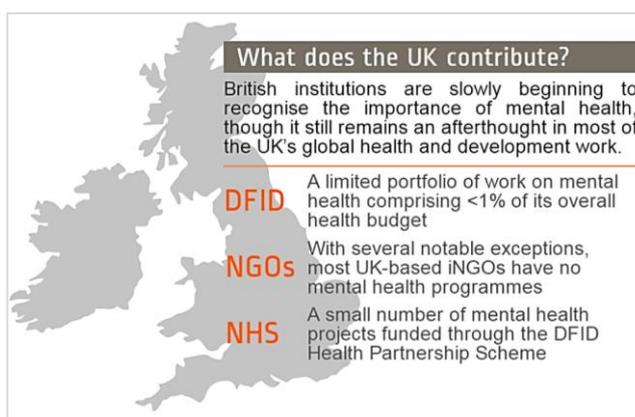


Figure 2. Adapted from 2014 All-Party Parliamentary Group Report: Mental Health for Sustainable Development²

Most MNS disorders can be treated by non-specialists without sophisticated medical equipment, meaning workers from a variety of sectors and organisations, including iNGOs, can be trained to deliver mental health interventions.^{2,17} Treatment can be very affordable: one package of care for priority MNS disorders in low- and lower-middle income countries costs US \$3-4 per head of population per year to deliver at scale.¹⁸ Studies have shown treatment of mental health problems to be as cost-effective as other health treatments such as antiretroviral therapy for HIV/AIDS, and return on investment is considerable.¹⁹ Mental health interventions can have a positive impact on a wide range of priority issues for iNGOs working in social, health and economic development.

Impact of Mental Health Interventions: Examples from Complementary Sectors

- **Maternal and Child Health:** Maternal mental health interventions can result in higher **birthweights** of infants²⁰
- **HIV/AIDS:** Talking therapies for people living with HIV/AIDS can improve **adherence** to anti-retroviral therapy²¹
- **Education:** School-based mental health interventions can improve **academic performance** of students²²
- **Gender:** Treating alcohol and substance use disorders can decrease **intimate partner violence**²³

Partnering for impact at scale

Many iNGOs have large catchment areas, strong relationships with key stakeholders, and the infrastructure to drastically increase access to services for people living with mental health problems in LMIC. The Mental Health Innovation Network (mhinnovation.net) has compiled an online “look-book” of 130 mental health innovations, mostly in low- and middle-income countries, all of which have either completed or are undergoing evaluation.²⁴ While many good ideas have proven effective, few have been delivered at a large scale for maximum impact.

Participants in the 2016 All-Party Parliamentary Group meeting on the role of iNGOs in mental health are encouraged to make use of this opportunity and of the Mental Health Innovation Network to create new alliances and explore how their organisation can make a difference in global mental health.

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