



WHO

Special Initiative for Mental Health



Ensuring access to quality and affordable mental health care for 100 million more people by 2028



Strategic Action 1:

Advancing mental health **policies**, advocacy and human rights



Strategic Action 2:

Scaling up quality **interventions and services** for mental health treatment and care

Launched in 2019, this initiative **brings mental health support closer to communities** in participating countries **by integrating services into local health centers** through WHO's Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP). The initiative trains healthcare workers to identify mental health conditions, provide basic care and support, and refer individuals to specialists when more advanced care is needed.

This initiative also involves close **collaboration with Ministry of Health teams** at both district and national levels **to drive broader, long-term changes**. This includes adopting new mental health laws, adding mental health services to public health coverage, and increasing national budget allocations for mental health.

Why is this work so critical?

Mental health conditions make up to **10% of the global burden of disease**

Nearly **1 billion people** have a mental disorder and **700,000 people die by suicide** each year

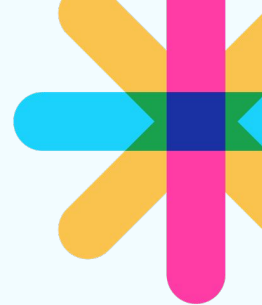
Global **economic losses** attributable to mental health condition **are estimated at US\$ 16 trillion**

Just **2.1% of countries' health budgets** is spent on mental health

Less than 0.3% of global development assistance for health **goes towards mental health**

In low-middle-income countries between **75% and 98% of people in need of support for mental health conditions receive no treatment** at all

Results of the Special Initiative for Mental Health to date



**60
million
more people**

HAVE ACCESS TO MENTAL
HEALTH SERVICES



Argentina

Closed a **psychiatric hospital ward** by ensuring continued community-based services for long-stay patients

720,000+
individuals

RECEIVED MENTAL HEALTH
TREATMENT FOR THE FIRST
TIME



Bangladesh

Appointed, for the first time, a **Director for Mental Health** via a restructuring of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

34,000+
personnel

TRAINED TO DELIVER
MENTAL HEALTH
SERVICES



Ghana

Included common mental health conditions in its **National Health Insurance Scheme** enabling free services for the whole population



Jordan

Incorporated **maternal mental health services** as part of pre and perinatal health services



Nepal

Expanded acute care **psychiatric beds in district hospitals**, improved referral and outpatient services, and established **supervision for trained workers**



Paraguay

Enacted a modern, rights-based **mental health law** and is **transitioning from reliance on long-stay psychiatric facilities**



Philippines

Secured **increased national funding for essential psychotropic medicines**, supporting consistent supply



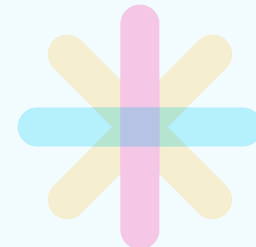
Ukraine

Aligned the influx of **mental health and psychosocial support efforts with government priorities** in response to the war



Zimbabwe

Introduced **mental health services in rural areas** and is **adapting government health positions** to include mental health services



Investment Opportunities

Building on the **success and results of the Special Initiative for Mental Health (SIMH) to date, WHO plans to expand the initiative** from 2025-2028. With a funding goal of USD 36 million, the expansion aims to **collaborate with 24 countries across WHO's six regions and facilitate regional learning** exchanges.

Investment	Actions	Financial investment
Targeted Investment Lower costs New countries <2 year timeline	Focused investment in new countries specific to <i>strategic action 1</i>: advancing mental health policies, laws, advocacy and human rights and addressing mental health specific barriers in care	Collaboration would be around two years long and any financial contribution would be welcomed
Consolidated Investment Lower costs Existing countries 2 - 3 year timeline	Phase down the scope of work in existing countries to focus on sustaining the gains made, and to prepare for ongoing transformation beyond the Special Initiative Potential for supporting thematic interventions (e.g., gender) in existing countries	Minimum of USD 500,000 needed to either launch new, or strengthen existing, activities
Intensive Investment Higher costs New countries 3 - 5 year timeline	Scaling to a new country (i.e., Cambodia work to begin in 2025) with any low-to-middle income country to be considered USD 1 provides 2 people with access to mental health care and treatment in their communities	USD 5 million for 5 years of work in 1 country



What is the return on investment?

Cost analyses show that for **every US\$ 1 million spent, more than 2 million people gain access** to newly available mental health services, at a cost of **less than US\$ 0.50 per person.**

An investment of US\$ 1.5 million will support at least 3 million more people having access to mental health services, and at least 30,000 children and adults living with mental health conditions to receive treatment for the first time.

Scaled-up treatment of mental disorders can yield great economic returns. Benefit-to-cost ratios range from **US\$ 2.3 to US\$ 3 for every dollar spent, and up to US\$ 7 per dollar** (incl. broader health benefits).

Why is WHO uniquely positioned for this work?



WHO Country offices will support implementation by collaborating with strategic partners to advance policy, advocacy, and human rights in mental health. It will provide technical and financial support to governments and partners for planning, executing, and monitoring activities, while documenting progress and evaluating outcomes.



WHO Regional Offices will assess priority needs, oversee country-level work, facilitate regional knowledge-sharing, and engage in advocacy, including media efforts, to promote effective mental health messaging.



WHO Headquarters will oversee and be accountable for the Special Initiative, providing technical inputs, guiding data collection and evaluation, and leading the development of new guidelines, technical resources, and information products.

WHO leverages its **global mandate, expertise, and strong partnerships with Ministries of Health to lead evidence-based mental health efforts**, coordinate global networks, and work directly through government systems across all settings.



Thank you.

Please keep in touch.

<https://who.foundation/>