



## MENTAL HEALTH KEY FOR HEALTHY WORKFORCE AND HEALTHY ECONOMIES

“It is time to prioritise mental health in the workplace” is the theme for this World Mental Health Day. As communities and civil society from the Asia-Pacific, we are reminded of the inseparable relationships between mental health, health systems, and access to gainful employment, especially as they have a compounding effect on key and vulnerable communities living with and/or affected by HIV, tuberculosis (TB) and malaria.

Safe and healthy work environments promote positive mental health and provide workers a sense of security through gainful employment. However, members of key and vulnerable populations often face societal, legal, and systematic barriers as well as stigma and discrimination<sup>1</sup> that prevent them from accessing quality health services and employment and/or safe and healthy environments for work. This results in a lack of financial security and may become a source of stress, anxiety, and depression – a situation exacerbated by a lack of financial protection in countries without Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and adequate social security.

Yves Miel Zuniga, Policy & Advocacy Advisor at United for Global Mental Health (UnitedGMH) says, “The bidirectional relationship between HIV, TB and mental health is clear. According to the [2021 report](#) by UnitedGMH, the integration of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services into HIV and TB programmes has the potential to prevent as many as 924,000 new HIV infections and 14 million TB infections by 2030. Moreover, people living with HIV and/or TB, especially multidrug-resistant TB, are at significantly higher risk of experiencing mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and psychosis. Thus, it is imperative that countries integrate mental healthcare as part of their HIV, TB and malaria programme interventions to boost treatment outcomes and quality of care as it improves treatment adherence and boost rates of treatment completion.”

As the region with the largest population in the world and the youngest; where HIV is concentrated amongst key populations; TB is concentrated amongst the poor and vulnerable; and where many countries are close to malaria elimination, there is an urgent need to ensure and step-up funding for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria (Global Fund) where financing can support the expansion of MHPSS services to the most impacted. The Global Fund’s 2023-2028 strategy lays out ways<sup>2</sup> to support the integration of mental health into HIV, TB and malaria programming and its [Guidance Note on the Prioritization Framework for Supporting Health and Longevity Among People Living with HIV \(Allocation Period 2023-2025\)](#) identified mental health as an HIV integration priority that should be built in across HIV platforms, and encourages applicants to consider integrating context-specific interventions/services including screening, diagnosis and treatment for mental, various neurological or substance use conditions.

According to the [World Health Organization World Mental Health Report 2022](#), even before the COVID-19 pandemic, just a small fraction of people in need had access to effective, affordable and quality mental health care.

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<sup>1</sup> These include ones’ medical status; sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC); criminalisation of sex work or drug use; stateless or refugee identities; and many other factors.

<sup>2</sup> They include: (a) “Integrate services to prevent, identify, and treat advanced HIV disease, comorbidities, and coinfections. This includes promoting HIV service integration with those for [...] mental health” (pp. 20); (b) “Support comprehensive quality TB services that are human rights based, gender responsive, people-centered, and integrated into health and community systems to manage existing conditions and comorbidities including mental health” (pp. 24); (c) “Proactively engage people living with disabilities and the mental health community at national, regional and global levels to ensure that Global Fund-supported and national programs become more responsive and accessible to people living with disabilities and mental health challenges and give greater attention to the numerous intersectionalities between these communities and those affected by the three diseases” (pp. 42); and (d) “Increase alignment with patient-led advocacy groups across relevant health sectors, including with groups focused on [...] mental health [...] to strengthen and underpin taking integrated, people-centered approaches to HTM and broader health programming.” (pp. 43)

## It is time to prioritise mental health in the workplace!



The [Global Fund Results Report 2024](#) also states that “stigmatization, discrimination and illness can also trigger significant mental health challenges”.

“Experience suggests that reaching marginalized groups of long-term unemployed, street sex workers, refugees, irregular migrants, and homeless people can be achieved by establishing outreach programmes, integrating mental health into general health care, coordinating social and health care and disseminating information to both individuals and practitioners. A competent and motivated workforce is a vital component of a well-functioning health system. In particular, primary care staff and a wide range of community workers and peers need to be equipped with new skills to detect mental health conditions, provide basic interventions and support, refer people where necessary, and follow-up,” says Moon Ali, Executive Director of Khawaja Sira Society (KSS) from Pakistan, and GFAN AP Steering Committee Member.

On this day, as key populations, communities, and civil societies from the Asia-Pacific region, we remind the world that key and vulnerable populations continue to be unfairly deprived of gainful employment due to stigma, discrimination, financial burdens, criminalisation, treatment side effects, aging, and other factors. Adding to this burden is the fact that key and vulnerable populations are at significantly higher risk of developing poor mental health, and poor mental health lowers treatment adherence and results in greater mortality. Therefore, we call on country leaders, donors and decisionmakers with the support of technical partners to:

1. Strengthen human resources for health, including closing the resourcing gap in MHPSS services, as a crucial and necessary step to ensure resilient and sustainable systems for health to combat HIV, TB and malaria as epidemics in primary care and community settings;
2. Counter the stigmatisation of mental health conditions through increasing awareness and training among community health workers and other primary health care (PHC) providers to ensure affected key and vulnerable populations are supported to access the full range of quality health services they need such as generalising the curriculum for mental health workers to include specialised training on LGBTQIA+ issues, HIV, TB and other communicable and non-communicable diseases;
3. Embed quality of life of people living with HIV and key populations and expand mental health care to community and primary settings including in the most remote and poorest regions, by addressing inequality, stigma, discrimination, and mental health in the upcoming Global AIDS Strategy; and
4. Support the upcoming Eighth Replenishment of the Global Fund in 2025 to ensure that mental health is included in the programmatic priorities and that sufficient resources are allocated to countries to finally end HIV, TB and malaria as epidemics to reach the Sustainable Development Goals and achieve UHC.

**As one community, we reiterate that there will be no end to HIV, TB and malaria without fully integrating mental health.**

The [Global Fund Advocates Network Asia-Pacific \(GFAN AP\)](#) is an advocacy platform of HIV, Tuberculosis and malaria community and civil society organisations in the Asia-Pacific region. GFAN AP supports advocacy for a fully resourced Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (Global Fund); increased and sustainable domestic resource mobilisation for health; and equitable, people-centred, human rights-based and gender transformative inclusion of HIV, Tuberculosis and malaria responses within Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

The [United for Global Mental Health \(UnitedGMH\)](#) is a charity organization working with partners toward its vision of a world where mental health support is accessible to everyone, everywhere without stigma or restrictions. UnitedGMH uses its expertise in advocacy, financing and campaigning to advance this vision and focus on four areas of strategic impact – rights, health systems, ecosystems, and field building – to deliver progress.

The [Seven Alliance](#) is a consortium of Asia-Pacific networks of key populations and people living with HIV composed of APCOM, APN+, APNSW, APTN, ICW-AP, NAPUD and Youth LEAD. The Seven Alliance serves as a unified, representative body for communities in all our diversity disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS across the region with the aim to promote effective community leadership and advocate for CLM as critical component of community-led responses and goal to establish strong and sustainable CLM mechanisms with communities in all their diversities in the Asia-pacific region.