

**Joint Statement in recognition of
2012 World Mental Health Day and
The WHO Draft Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020**

We, the NGO Committee on Mental Health (New York) Affiliated with the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CoNGO) and the NGO Forum for Health (Geneva), commend the World Health Organization (WHO) on the landmark WHO Resolution, *The Global Burden of Mental Disorders and the Need for a Comprehensive, Coordinated Response from Health and Social Sectors at the Country Level* approved by the World Health Assembly in May 2012. This landmark resolution resulted in the major initiative to implement the recommendations via the recent draft *Global Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020*. Thus, mental health has been recognized as an integral part of the urgent need for a comprehensive global health agenda to protect and promote the well-being of all people.

The *WHO Global Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020*, has the potential to generate a world-wide revolution in the availability and quality of mental health care and its strategic aims complement those of several strategic plans already in place, such as the *Global Strategy to Reduce the Harmful Use of Alcohol (2010)*, the *Global Action Plan on Social Determinants of Health (2012)*, the *Action Plan for Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases (2008-13)*, *Worker's Health: Global Plan of Action (2007)* and the *Global Campaign for Violence Prevention (2012-2020)*.

The theme of the 2012 World Mental Health Day is underscored by the fact that depression accounts currently for the third highest burden of disease, globally, and anticipated to be the number one burden by 2030. As depression is significantly higher for females than males, WHO (2008) reports that it is already the leading cause of disease burden for women across all countries and income levels. Recent models of male depression implicate aggressive acting out and substance abuse as symptoms of "male depression." The interaction of these gendered forms of depression has especially deleterious effects when substance abuse and violence affect families and communities. Suicide, an extreme behavioral expression of depression, is already the second most common death among young people globally (GMHAP, p. 3) Therefore, an ethical mandate to whole-heartedly embrace, refine, and implement the *WHO Global Mental Health Action Plan* compels thoughtful, swift action, with good information feedback mechanisms.

We commend the *WHO Mental Health Action Plan* for its recognition of the inseparable linkages of mental and physical health. Not only depression, but also all forms of mental disorders are integrally related to physical conditions like cancer, cardiovascular disease and HIV/AIDS. Likewise, mental health and illness interact with a wide variety of environmental factors such as poverty, homelessness, crime, violence (especially family violence), war, environmental degradation and disasters, economic vulnerability, unemployment, and lack of education.

Recommendations:

- We especially commend the vision statement of the *Global Mental Health Action Plan* for its breadth and specificity, while seeking to have the integrative language that is evident throughout the document. As mental health is an inseparable aspect of general health and well being, it is important to include it in the vision statement so that the linkages of mental, physical, and social health are underscored.
- The “after conflict” statements must include family violence and neighborhood sexual assault, as these are the most commonly experienced causes of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and of daily suffering for the greatest number of people. Emphasis on the negative consequences of natural disasters and war should not overshadow the most common behavioral causes of mental suffering.
- Strengthen the concern for the mental health of women and girls who bear a disproportionate responsibility for care-giving despite being disadvantaged by gender bias and access to educational and income producing opportunities. Keeping mothers of young children mentally healthy and physically safe is perhaps one of the single most powerful interventions to reduce mental illness and to increase resilience. Simultaneously, it is important to address the psychosocial and health needs of older persons who are also often in care-giving roles.
- Delineate specific plans to cross-train primary health care workers in basic mental health care principles and support mental health specialists in providing supervision/consultation. It is also essential to include indigenous traditions and healing and culturally relevant approaches when considering interventions and treatment.
- Develop a stronger accountability mechanism that can measure the actions and implementation of steps by Member States to achieve outcome goals. As stated by Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization, "what is not measured does not get done."
- Embrace the new and expanding roles of civil society and the active engagement of civil society by WHO and member states as partners in the future well being of our world. We commend the request for feedback from civil society organizations on the *Global Mental Health Action Plan* via the online consultation process.

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If your organization would like to be listed as an endorser of this statement, please email the information below to: NGO Committee on Mental Health, mentalhealthngo@optonline.net. If you have further questions please contact Dr. Elizabeth Carll at ecarll@optonline.net

Name of your organization and your name:

Contact information for the organization (ie. email address; website):

Is your NGO in consultative status to ECOSOC?: