Joint Statement to the
United Nations High-level Meeting on Noncommunicable Disease Prevention and Control
19-20 September 2011 - New York, USA

Mental Health and the Scope of Noncommunicable Diseases

We, the NGO Forum for Health (Geneva) and the NGO Committee on Mental Health (New York) Affiliated with the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CoNGO) jointly support the WHO Action Plan for a Global Strategy for Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs) and efforts to ensure its implementation at all levels. At the same time, we recall the following:

- In December 2010, the United Nations General Assembly stressed that “mental health problems are of major importance to all societies and are significant contributors to the burden of disease and the loss of quality of life and have huge economic and social costs” in a resolution calling for increased attention to health as an important policy issue on the international agenda: Global health and foreign policy.
- In the same resolution, the General Assembly reaffirmed “the central role of the United Nations system in meeting the challenges of global health in a changing environment and the need to enhance the visibility of health issues in the different United Nations forums”.
- Since its entry into force in 1948, the Constitution of the World Health Organization states that “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”.

We therefore urge Member States of the United Nations to include mental health as a fundamental consideration in their approach to NCDs.

We applaud The Brazzaville Declaration on Noncommunicable Diseases Prevention and Control in the WHO African Region of 6 April 2011 in this regard, with its explicit inclusion of mental disorders in the NCD agenda.

We also support the Moscow Declaration of the First Global Ministerial Conference on Healthy Lifestyles and Noncommunicable Disease Control of 28-29 April 2011 which recognizes mental disorders as NCDs that “significantly contribute to the global disease burden”.

We stress the fact that the inclusion of mental health in the WHO Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases will strengthen, intensify, and hasten its achievement.

Mental health disorders are noncommunicable diseases with features in common with the selected NCDs - cancers, cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory disorders and diabetes - notably chronicity and the need for long-term treatment and care.

Furthermore, we underscore that NCDs and mental disorders together originate in “conditions in which people live” and both are clearly implicated when one is “mindful of the strong links between non-communicable diseases and poverty”. We agree with the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health that health strategies must build squarely on the premise that improved conditions of life and the eradication of poverty are fundamental to the improvement of human health and well-being.

These diseases arise together. Persons with diabetes have twice the risk of being depressed as non-diabetic persons. New research shows that depression and life style risks – lack of exercise, obesity and smoking - are together strong determinants of Alzheimer’s disease, as they are of the four selected NCDs. Because of their extraordinary long-term demand on health systems and human resources and the need for their sustainability, the dementias are emerging as the most costly global epidemic yet; action to prevent them must be prioritized.

We urge the Heads of State and Government of the United Nations to acknowledge that to enhance global health and lower the economic burden of disease, especially in resource poor settings, interventions must address the two groups of diseases inseparably. Omission of mental disorders from the global NCD agenda will only aggravate the stigma attached to these disorders.

We urge the United Nations High-level Meeting to determine the indivisible inclusion of mental disorders in noncommunicable diseases and to commit the United Nations system to action on mental health within the NCD global agenda.

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NGO Forum for Health (Geneva) and NGO Committee on Mental Health (New York)

Endorsements

AARP
ADAPT - London, UK
Aga Khan Foundation
Alcohol and other Drug Council of Australia
Alzheimer’s Disease International
American Psychological Association
Armenian Constitutional Right-Protective Centre
Association for the Improvement of Mental Health Programmes
Association of World Citizens
Central Gauteng Mental Health Society, Johannesburg
Central Sanitaire Suisse
Central Veterinary Laboratory, Tanzania
Communications Coordination Committee for the United Nations
Community Outreach for Development and Welfare Advocacy, United Kingdom
Congregations Of Saint Joseph
CSO Citizens for a UN People’s Assembly
Democratic World Federalists
Deutsches Institut für Ärzliche Mission
Disaster Response and Resilience Research Group, University of Western Sydney, Australia
European Association for Counselling
Excellent Concept Organization, Accra, Ghana
Gauteng Consumer Advocacy Movement, Johannesburg
Global Alcohol Policy Alliance
Global Welfare Association, Cameroon
Gray Panthers
Institute for Planetary Synthesis
Institute of Psychiatry, King’s College London
International AIDS Society
International Alliance of Women
International Association for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Allied Professions
International Association for Counselling
International Association of Applied Psychology
International Baby Food Action Network
International Council of Nurses
International Council of Psychologists
International Council of Women
International Federation for Business and Professional Women
International Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers
International Federation of Social Workers
International Federation on Ageing
International Health Awareness Network
International Medical Corps
International Movement For Fraternal Union Among Races and Peoples, Belgium
International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation
International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies
International Union Against Cancer
International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences
Kosmos Associates, Inc.
Life University
Member Care Associates
Mental Health America
Mission Australia
MJoTA Institute of Medical Writing
Mount Sinai School of Medicine, Program in Global Psychiatry
National Council of Women /USA.
Nepal Mental Health Foundation
New York State Psychological Association
Nord-Sud XXI, Switzerland
Olof Palme Peace Foundation
Pan Pacific and Southeast Asia Women’s Association
PCI-Media Impact
Peoples’ Health Movement - Safe Observer International
Public Services International
RESID - Réseau d’Éducation et de Soutien aux Initiatives de Développement, Cameroun
SHARE (Australia) Inc
Society for Social Work Leadership in Health Care
Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues
Soroptimist International
South African Federation for Mental Health
Ted Noffs Foundation, Australia.
The Clifford Beers Foundation
The Human Lactation Center
The Leprosy Mission International
The Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem University Health Network, Ontario, Canada
William Alanson White Institute of Psychiatry,
Psychoanalysis and Psychology
Women Consortium of Nigeria
Women International Zionist Organisation, Tel Aviv Israel
Women of Reform Judaism
World Alliance of YMCAs
World Council for Psychotherapy
World Council of Churches
World Federation for Mental Health
World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations
World Mission Foundation
World Vision International
World YWCA
Worldwide Organisation for Women
Yeshiva University, Wurzweiler School of Social Work
Youth Action Movement, Gambia
ZONTA International

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