

IIMHL & IIDL Leadership Briefing XII

COVID-19: International aspects for future mental health services

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This briefing highlights the need for future strengthening of mental health services across the world. Both the United Nations and World Health Organisation (WHO) argue that as mental health problems are increasing world-wide as the result of COVID-19, strengthening service development for mental health services is needed across all countries. The third article presents a NZ view of needed changes from an NGO perspective, which may resonate with NGOs in many countries.

Policy Brief: COVID-19 and the Need for Action on Mental Health

United Nations May 2020

During the past few months, efforts have been initiated to support people in distress and to ensure care for people with mental health conditions. Innovative ways of providing mental health services have been implemented, and initiatives to strengthen psychosocial support have commenced.

Yet, because of the size of the problem, the vast majority of mental health needs remain unaddressed. The response is hampered by the lack of investment in mental health promotion, prevention and care before the pandemic. The WHO has stated that this historic underinvestment in mental health needs to be redressed without delay to reduce immense suffering among hundreds of millions of people and mitigate long-term social and economic costs to society.

Three actions are recommended:

1. Apply a whole-of-society approach to promote, protect and care for mental health
2. Ensure widespread availability of emergency mental health and psychosocial support
3. Support recovery from covid-19 by building mental health services for the future

“Rapid implementation of these recommended actions will be essential to ensure people and societies are better protected from the mental health impact of COVID-19.”

https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_policy_brief-covid_and_mental_health_final.pdf

Substantial investment needed to avert mental health crisis

WHO May 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic is highlighting the need to urgently increase investment in services for mental health or risk a massive increase in mental health conditions in the coming months, according to a policy brief on COVID-19 and mental health issued by the United Nations today.

“The impact of the pandemic on people’s mental health is already extremely concerning,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization. “Social isolation, fear of contagion, and loss of family members is compounded by the distress caused by loss of income and often employment.”

Three key issues are highlighted by WHO:

1. Depression and anxiety are increasing across all countries
2. Mental health services delivery has been interrupted
3. But we do have an opportunity to “**build back better**”

“The scaling-up and reorganization of mental health services that is now needed on a global scale is an opportunity to build a mental health system that is fit for the future,” said Dévora Kestel, Director of the Department of Mental Health and Substance Use at WHO. “This means developing and funding national plans that shift care away from institutions to community services, ensuring coverage for mental health conditions in health insurance packages and building the human resource capacity to deliver quality mental health and social care in the community.”

<https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/14-05-2020-substantial-investment-needed-to-avert-mental-health-crisis>

Change for Good: Please Press Pause

The Wise Group April 2020

Wise Group has sent a report on behalf of many Non-Government Organisations (NGOS) to the New Zealand Government. The “Please Press Pause” report has an important message about taking the time to reflect on some of the sector transformation that has been nimbly achieved over the past weeks so that we don’t lose any of the social good that has been gained through the COVID-19 crisis.

The report notes: “What are we rushing back to? The non-government charitable sector request: Please Press Pause before we lose everything we’ve discovered together through this crisis”.

The report contains a table with three headings across the top: Our old normal, Level 4 (which was strict lockdown in New Zealand) and Our new world. Covering “Government”, “Vulnerable populations” and “Where and how we work” are nineteen areas showing the improvement from old normal to our new world.

Topics covered include things like: Government: Decision making, contracts and reporting and audits; plus Vulnerable populations include homeless/rough sleeper, people with a mental illness and justice/corrections populations; finally, where and how we work includes offices, mobile outreach and use of technology.

The report demonstrates that “Our new world” could be so much better than our old.

<https://www.wisegroup.co.nz/creating-change/change-for-good/>