

The Facts

- Mental illness is one of the great invisible burdens on all societies, accounting for four of the 10 leading causes of disability worldwide.¹
- Globally, about 450 million people suffer from some form of mental illness.²
- Mental illness represents 13% of the global disease burden, surpassing both cardiovascular disease and cancer.³
- Around 20% of the world's children and adolescents are estimated to have mental disorders, with similar types of conditions being reported across cultures.⁴
- After humanitarian emergencies, the rate of common mental disorders such as depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can increase from a baseline rate of 10% of the population to between 15 and 20%.⁵
- Low-income countries have 0.05 psychiatrists and 0.42 nurses per 100, 000 people. The rate of psychiatrists in high-income countries is 170 times greater and for nurses 70 times greater.⁶
- A 2011 World Economic Forum report estimated the cost of the global burden of mental illness in 2010 was \$2.5 trillion. This cost is projected to rise above \$6 trillion by 2030—an amount three times greater than overseas development assistance spent by all nations between 1990-2010.⁷
- Unemployment rates among individuals with mental health disorders can be as high as 90%.⁸
- Mental illness impacts not only individuals but whole families by increasing the burden of caretakers and reducing the ability of affected individuals to contribute to livelihood, household and community tasks.



¹ International Medical Corps Capability Statement, International Medical Corps Mental Health & Psychosocial Support, January 2013.

² World Health Organization, Investing in Mental Health, http://www.who.int/mental_health/media/investing_mnh.pdf, 2003.

³ Vikram Patel, Ted Blog, <http://blog.ted.com/2012/09/11/some-stats-on-the-devastating-impact-of-mental-illness-worldwide-followed-by-some-reasons-for-hope/>, September 11, 2012.

⁴ World Health Organization, 10 Facts on Mental Health, http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/mental_health_facts/en/index7.html

⁵ International Medical Corps, IMC Libya, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Assessment Report, November 2011, <http://internationalmedicalcorps.org/document.doc?id=239>, p. 5; World Health Organization, 2005.

⁶ World Health Organization, 10 Facts on Mental Health, http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/mental_health_facts/en/index7.html.

⁷ Bloom, D.E., Cafiero, E.T., Jané-Llopis, E., Abrahams-Gessel, S., Bloom, L.R., Fathima, S., Feigl, A.B., Gaziano, T., Mowafi, M., Pandya, A., Prettner, K., Rosenberg, L., Seligman, B., Stein, A.Z., & Weinstein, C. "The Global Economic Burden of Non-Communicable Diseases", The World Economic Forum and the Harvard School of Public Health, http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Harvard_HE_GlobalEconomicBurdenNonCommunicableDiseases_2011.pdf, September 2011.

⁸ World Health Organization, News Release, People with mental disabilities cannot be forgotten, http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2010/mental_disabilities_20100916/en/, September 10, 2010.

The Challenge

Create accessible, quality mental health services in line with national and global guidelines by designing comprehensive, culturally and linguistically appropriate programs that build local human resource capacity and strengthen health systems.

Our Work

- International Medical Corps is a recognized leader in addressing both common and severe mental health problems in emergency conditions.
- We are one of the few international emergency response organizations to make sustainable, accessible mental health and psychosocial care a cornerstone of its relief and development programming.
- We are also one of the few such organizations with the capacity to address the general psychosocial needs of communities struck by humanitarian crises and assist those with crisis-related and pre-existing mental health disorders.
- Our mental health and psychosocial support programs build the capacity of the host country's existing public health system infrastructure and make care accessible at the community level by working through primary health care facilities.
- We design integrated mental health programs that reach the most vulnerable. For instance, an Early Childhood Development program for mothers with young children in refugee or displaced communities that focuses on cognitive, social and emotional development, as well as food and nutritional needs, improves child development and growth, as well as maternal mental health.

What the U.S. Government Should Do

Support a strategy for mental health and psychosocial services that helps build the capacity of countries in quality and accessible mental health service provision. The plan would strengthen health systems and human resources and include mental health with a broad array of other critical services such as general health care, nutrition and maternal and child health. Components of this strategy should include steps that:

- protect and promote the rights of those with mental illness;
- help fight stigma, facilitate full participation in society and mutual support for those affected;
- include a continuum of support ranging from psychological first aid and general community services at initial points of contact, to more specialized care for select individuals with mental illness;
- provide psychological first aid training for both first responders and primary health clinic staff as part of disaster preparedness programs;
- fund evidence based research that can (1) better evaluate the impact of mental health and psychological programs undertaken in low-income, developing countries, and (2) increase understanding of mental health within different cultural contexts.



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