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## **Mental Health and Neurological Disorders**



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Happy smiling girl with facepaint

Mental health is a state of wellbeing where people and societies function at their best.

A person's ability to maintain good mental health is down to a range of factors, which are often beyond their control. The determinants of mental health include social, environmental, psychological, and biological factors. These include the major NCD risk factors of alcohol and tobacco use, unhealthy diet, and physical inactivity.

## Fast Facts

- Mental health is the state of wellbeing where people and societies function at their best.
- Mental health and neurological disorders are one of the major groups of [noncommunicable diseases \(NCDs\)](#) [1], which affect people's thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and relationships.
- They include a diverse range of diseases and conditions such as depression, schizophrenia, dementia, Alzheimer's disease, anxiety, and substance abuse disorders, among many others. An estimated 450-500 million people live with mental conditions worldwide.
- A person's ability to maintain good mental health is down to a range of factors, which are often beyond their control. The determinants of mental health include social, environmental, psychological, and biological factors. These include the major NCD risk factors of [alcohol](#) [2] and [tobacco](#) [3] use, [unhealthy diet](#) [4], and [physical inactivity](#) [5].
- There is no health without mental health. Mental health has links to [cancer](#) [6], [diabetes](#) [7], [cardiovascular](#) [8] and [respiratory diseases](#) [9] and other NCDs, often co-occurring with them.
- COVID-19 pandemic has both highlighted and accelerated the need to tackle mental health conditions, which have become more prevalent during the pandemic and its response.
- Investment for mental health is often the lowest of all disease areas. In low-income countries, this is typically around 1-2% of total health budgets.

## What are mental health and neurological disorders?

Mental health is a state of wellbeing where people and societies function at their best. That is, where people can cope with the stresses of everyday life, work productively, and contribute to their communities.

Mental health conditions and neurological disorders are conditions that affect thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and relationships. These include disorders that cause a high burden of disease such as depression, bipolar affective disorder, schizophrenia, anxiety disorders, dementia, substance use disorders, among many others. These conditions can be experienced in isolation; however, they often occur alongside other noncommunicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, respiratory diseases and cancers.

They also share many [NCD risk factors](#) [10], such as tobacco use, alcohol use, unhealthy diets and physical inactivity.

Mental health and wellbeing are central to reducing the global burden of NCDs and were included as part of the 5x5 approach to tackling NCDs by the World Health Organization in 2018.

## What are the common mental health disorders?

### Depression

Depression is when a person experiences depressed mood (feeling sad, irritable, empty) or a loss of pleasure or interest in activities for more than two weeks. Depression can severely impact a person's ability to function and interact with people and society. It is estimated that around 264 million people are affected by depression, or around 5% of adults.

Women are more affected by depression than men. Worldwide about 10% of pregnant women and 13% of women who have just given birth experience a mental disorder, primarily depression. In developing countries, this is even higher – 15.6% during pregnancy and 19.8% after.

Depression can impede personal development, health, education, and employment. Severe cases of depression can lead to suicide. 75% of suicides occur in low- and middle-income countries, but effective strategies such as early detection, treatment and ongoing support mean suicide can be prevented.

### Dementia

Dementia is a type of degenerative brain syndrome that negatively affects multiple cognitive processes, including memory, behaviour, emotional processing and control, and cognition. There are multiple forms of dementia, with Alzheimer's disease being the most common.

There are currently 55 million people live with dementia worldwide, with close to 10 million new cases every year. This number will increase to an estimated 75 million in 2030, and 139 million in 2050. Much of the increase will be in developing countries.

### Alzheimer's Disease

It is estimated that 60-75% of dementia cases can be classified as Alzheimer's Disease (AD). AD causes the destruction of brain cells and associated nerves and interferes with neurotransmitter functions. Particularly, the memory system of the brain is compromised. As the disease progresses, an individual's capacity to communicate, think, and remember deteriorates.

## What are the risk factors for mental health and neurological disorders?

Mental conditions are often determined by the environment and social circumstances in which people live, and their exposure to risk factors. Risk factors for mental and neurological diseases include genetics, older age, tobacco use, drug and alcohol use, unhealthy diet, and physical inactivity. Environmental exposures, such as pollution and cranial injuries, also place individuals at risk.

### Mental health and COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the urgent need to prioritise mental health. While COVID-19 is first a physical crisis, WHO have now warned of a mental health crisis if action is not taken now.

There is rising prevalence of mental health conditions because of the fear and psychological stress of getting infected with COVID-19, but also stress relating to changes in the way we live our lives. These include family stress, work

stress, loss of income, and social isolation, with some facing increased abuse, disrupted education and uncertainty about the future.

The pandemic has also led people to adopt negative coping mechanisms, including use of alcohol, drugs, tobacco or spending more time on potentially addictive behaviours such as online gaming.

## How can we prevent mental health and neurological disorders?

Research on prevention of mental health and neurological disorders is still being developed, but health-promoting lifestyle choices can decrease one's risk of these diseases.

A nutritious diet, avoidance of tobacco, abstinence from alcohol, and increased physical activity all can qualify as preventative measures. Worldwide 10-20% of children and adolescents experience mental disorders. Half of all mental illnesses begin by the age of 14 and three-quarters by mid-20s. Focussing on prevention throughout the life course, through early detection and prevention of mental health problems, is critical.

## How do you treat mental health and neurological disorders?

Though there currently is no one cure for mental health and neurological disorders, some specific diseases have treatments available.

For Alzheimer's Disease, there is a class of drug treatments known as cholinesterase inhibitors that can slow the progression of the disease. Other drugs are available to dampen some specific symptoms of mental health disorders, such as mood swings and sleeplessness.

Beyond drugs, emotional support and therapy is often employed to help those affected by mental health disorders.

However, the reality is that health systems have not yet adequately responded to the burden of mental health disorders. There is a large gap in between the need for treatment and access around the world. In low- and middle-income countries, an estimated 76% to 85% of people diagnosed with mental health disorders receive no treatment. In high income countries, this is also high, between 35 % and 50 %.

People with mental health disorders often experience severe human rights violations, discrimination, and stigma. This leads to many people never seeking diagnosis or treatment for their conditions.

## Case Study: Community initiatives to get mental health care to rural populations in India

150 million people in India need mental health intervention and 80 million people do not have access to mental health care. Learn about the [Mariwala Health Initiative](#) [11]'s Atmiyata project, which empowers communities in India to respond to their own mental health needs, in a way that is accessible, feasible, sustainable and scalable.

## Policies and programmes to reduce the burden of mental health and neurological disorders

Mental health is an important global public health concern, as indicated by its inclusion as a major noncommunicable disease in the 5x5 initiative by the World Health Organization in 2018.

Furthermore, the WHO Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030 was launched in 2019, as an extension of the WHO Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020 which was originally endorsed in 2013. The plan is centred around the idea that,

“mental health is valued, promoted and protected, mental disorders are prevented and persons affected by these disorders are able to exercise the full range of human rights and to access high quality, culturally-appropriate health and social care in a timely way to promote recovery, in order to attain the highest possible level of health and participate fully in society and at work, free from stigmatization and discrimination.”

It's estimated that the global economy loses more than US\$ 1 trillion per year due to depression and anxiety. Despite its devastating impact on people, societies and economies, countries spend on average less than 2% of their total health budgets on mental health, while international assistance for mental health is less than 1%. Policies to promote mental health are diverse and multisectoral.

They include:

- Taxation of alcohol and restrictions on its marketing and availability.
- Increased access to mental health treatment and care, including antidepressant medicines for depression, and treatment of psychosis with antipsychotic medicines and psychosocial support.
- Laws, policies, and programmes that promote rights, opportunities and care for people living with and affected by mental health conditions and their risk factors – including anti-discrimination laws and initiatives to reduce stigma around mental health and their risk factors.
- Programmes focussing on the socio-economic empowerment of woman, including access to educational opportunities and microcredit schemes.
- Early childhood interventions aimed at providing a stable environment that is sensitive to children's health and nutritional needs. Including ensuring they are emotionally supported, protected from threats, have learning opportunities and can interact with others.
- Programmes that support children and adolescent development throughout the life course, including school-based initiatives that promote good mental health.
- Programmes that support elderly populations, like befriending initiatives, community, and day centres for the aged.
- Programmes targeting vulnerable people, including minorities, Indigenous people, migrants and people affected by conflicts and disasters.
- Mental health interventions at work, such as stress prevention programmes and increased mental health promotion.
- Housing policies.
- Violence prevention programmes (e.g. reducing availability of alcohol and access to arms).
- Community development programmes (e.g. integrated rural development).
- Poverty reduction and social protection for the poor.

World Mental Health Day is held annually on 10 October.

**Source:**

- [Alzheimer's Disease International \[PDF\]](#). [12]
- [World Health Organization 2021](#) [13][PDF]
- [Mental health action plan 2013-2020](#) [14]
- [Mental health: strengthening our response](#) [15]
- [Linking Mental Health & NCD Alliance Campaign Priorities for the 2018 UN HLM on NCDs](#) [16]
- [Evaluation of Peripartum Depression in Females](#) [17]

***This page was last updated on 18 February 2022***

**Related Resource:** [World Alzheimer Report 2016 - Improving healthcare for people living with dementia](#). [18]  
[Mental Health Atlas 2017](#) [19]  
[WHO - Mental Disorders](#) [20]



[WHO - Mental Health Gap Action Programme \(mhGAP\) Intervention Guide](#) [21]

[WHO Mental Health Action Plan 2013 - 2020](#) [22]

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**Search Keywords:** NCDs, Mental Illness, Neurological Disease



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### Links

#### Teaser Image:

[1] <https://ncdalliance.org/why-ncds/NCDs>

[2] <https://ncdalliance.org/why-ncds/risk-factors-prevention/harmful-use-of-alcohol>

[3] <https://ncdalliance.org/why-ncds/risk-factors-prevention/tobacco-use>

[4] <https://ncdalliance.org/why-ncds/risk-factors-prevention/unhealthy-diets-and-malnutrition>

[5] <https://ncdalliance.org/why-ncds/risk-factors-prevention/physical-activity>

[6] <https://ncdalliance.org/why-ncds/ncds/cancer>

[7] <https://ncdalliance.org/why-ncds/ncds/diabetes>

[8] <https://ncdalliance.org/why-ncds/ncds/cardiovascular-diseases>

[9] <https://ncdalliance.org/why-ncds/ncds/chronic-respiratory-diseases>

[10] <https://ncdalliance.org/why-ncds/risk-factors-prevention>

[11] <https://mhi.org.in/>

[12] <http://https://www.alzint.org/about/dementia-facts-figures/> Policy Brief: COVID-19 and the Need for Action on Mental Health

[13] [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un\\_policy\\_brief-covid\\_and\\_mental\\_health\\_final.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_policy_brief-covid_and_mental_health_final.pdf)

[14] <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/89966> WHO Mental Disorders <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-disorders>

[15] <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>

[16] <http://https://ncdalliance.org/resources/linking-mental-health-ncd-alliance-campaign-priorities-for-the-2018-un-hlm-on-ncds-0>

- [17] <http://https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6822329/>
- [18] <https://ncdalliance.org/resources/world-alzheimer-report-2016-improving-healthcare-for-people-living-with-dementia>
- [19] <https://ncdalliance.org/resources/mental-health-atlas-2017>
- [20] <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs396/en/>
- [21] [http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/publications/mhGAP\\_intervention\\_guide/en/](http://www.who.int/mental_health/publications/mhGAP_intervention_guide/en/)
- [22] [https://www.who.int/mental\\_health/publications/action\\_plan/en/](https://www.who.int/mental_health/publications/action_plan/en/)
- [23] <https://ncdalliance.org/news-events/news/mentally-healthy-at-work>
- [24] <https://ncdalliance.org/taxonomy/term/380>
- [25] <https://ncdalliance.org/category/tags/mental-health>
- [26] <https://ncdalliance.org/taxonomy/term/68>
- [27] <https://ncdalliance.org/taxonomy/term/299>