

MEDIA STATEMENT

To: Editors & Health Journalists
Issued by: Department of Health
Date: Monday, 10 October 2022

World Mental Health Awareness Day – 10 October

Pretoria: South Africa joins the global community to commemorate the World Mental Health Day to raise awareness of mental health issues around the world and to mobilise efforts in support of mental health.

The Day also provides an opportunity for all stakeholders in the area of mental health to talk about mental health issues, and what more needs to be done to make mental health care a reality for people worldwide.

Stigma and discrimination are some of the leading contributing factors that exacerbate the situation and delay or stop mental health patients from getting help, hence the department appeals to family and community members to play a key role in providing significant support and care to persons suffering from mental illness/psychological distress.

In South Africa the most common mental health disorders include anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress and substance use disorders.

The 2022 World Mental Health Day campaign is commemorated under the theme: ***“Make mental health and well-being for all a global priority”*** which serves as a clarion call for governments, donor funders and all stakeholders worldwide to prioritise mental health.

This is because, among others, international development assistance for mental health is estimated to be less than 1% of all development assistance for health and this can be improved.

South Africa spends 5% of the total health budget on mental health services. This is in line with the lower end of international benchmarks of the recommended amount that countries should spend on mental health.

The latest available data indicate that on average, most countries spend about 2.13% of their total health budgets on mental health which does not correspond with the scale of the problem and the burden of mental ill-health.

As part of the efforts to decentralise mental health services which historically were provided only in specialised psychiatric hospitals, the department has been integrating

mental health into general health services environment in line with the Mental Health Care Act, 2002 to ensure that people access mental health services nearer to where they stay or work. So far, over 40 mental health/psychiatric units have been attached to general hospitals across the country.

These units provide comprehensive mental health care, treatment and rehabilitation on an inpatient and outpatient basis and refer to specialized psychiatric hospitals only those who need more specialized and complex interventions.

The National Health Council has resolved that construction of all new health facilities, hospitals or clinics, should have a dedicated mental health unit included to improve access to quality mental health services.

The department working with provinces, has contracted 126 private specialists including the psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, occupational therapists and registered counsellors to complement the already available staff and provide mental health services at primary health care and also conduct mental observations as part of interventions to fast track mental observations in terms of the Criminal Procedure's Act. These extra hands will further improve access to and quality of mental health services.

On the other hand, the health workers at primary health care level are trained using the Adult Primary Care (APC) tool to improve their skills in early identification, effective management, and timely referral of those who need higher level interventions. Health care workers working in general hospitals that admit people with mental health conditions are also regularly in-serviced to strengthen and update their skills in mental health services provision

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