



Mental Health and Well-Being in Times of COVID-19
30 March 2021, 9:00 – 10:15 (EDT, New York)

Co-hosts: World Health Organization; Co-Chairs of the UN Group of Friends of Mental Health and Well-being; UNICEF; International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP); The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC); UN System Workplace Mental Health and Well-being, Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance (DMSPC);

Background

Marking over a year since the COVID-19 was declared a public health emergency of international concern, it is timely we examine the effects this crisis has had on mental health and well-being. Societies have been severely impacted by the pandemic and mental health and well-being is a priority that needs to be addressed urgently.

Added to the fear of contracting the virus are the significant changes to our daily lives as the efforts to contain and slow down its spread has led to lockdowns. New realities of working from home, loss of employment, home-schooling of children, and lack of physical contact with other family members, friends and colleagues take time to get used to and have taken a toll on our mental well-being. These challenges can be exacerbated even more so for people with mental health conditions. Many people may be facing increased levels of alcohol and drug abuse, insomnia, and anxiety.

Surveys have shown that COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted or halted critical mental health services in 93% of countries worldwide while the demand for mental health is increasing. Over 60% of countries have reported disruptions to mental health services for vulnerable people, including children and adolescents (72%), and older adults (70%). More than 168 million children globally have been studying from home for almost an entire year due to COVID-19 lockdowns. For children facing extreme deprivations, acute stress can impair their cognitive development and trigger longer-term mental health challenges. The longer schools remain closed, the less likely children are to catch up on learning and essential life skills that support a healthy transition to adulthood. This is exacerbated by the digital divide which will certainly impact children's educational progress in many developing countries.

Fortunately, there are many things that can be done to improve our mental health and to assist those who may need additional support and care. In this regard, the WHO Executive Board in January adopted a decision on integrating mental health in all public health emergencies preparedness and response. Together with partners, WHO is providing guidance and advice during the COVID-19 pandemic for health workers, managers of health facilities, people who are caring for children, older adults, people in isolation and members of the general public.

Objective

Presenting experience from professionals in the field and examples from member states, the event aims to share practical tools, best practices and resources, as well as self-care tools, to help navigate through this difficult time and to strengthen and support our mental health and psychosocial well-being.

Agenda

Welcome

Mr. Stewart Simonson: Assistant Director-General, WHO

H.E. Ms. Helena del Carmen Yáñez Loza: Ambassador, Deputy Permanent Representative of Ecuador to the United Nations

Moderator

Mr. Werner Obermeyer: Director, WHO Office at the United Nations

Country Experiences

Panellists:

Mr. Ghanshyam Bhandari: Minister Plenipotentiary, Deputy Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations

Ms. Elene Agladze: Deputy Permanent Representative of Georgia to the UN

Dr. Myla Harrison: Acting Executive Deputy Commissioner, Mental Hygiene, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

Virtual Round Table

Panellists:

Ms. Therese Fitzpatrick: Global Lead Mental Health Strategy, UN

Dr. Devora Kestel: Director of the Department of Mental Health and Substance Use, WHO

Dr. Zeinab Hijazi: Mental Health & Psychosocial Support Specialist, UNICEF

Dr. Judy Kuriansky: Main United Nations NGO Representative, International Association of Applied Psychology & World Council for Psychotherapy

Mr. Elliot Nazonse: MHPSS focal point from Malawi Red Cross

Questions from the Floor

Closing