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Over a billion people living with mental health conditions – services require urgent scale-up

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More than 1 billion people are living with mental health disorders, according to new data released by the World Health Organization (WHO), with conditions such as anxiety and depression inflicting immense human and

economic tolls. While many countries have bolstered their mental health policies and programmes, greater investment and action are needed globally to scale up services to protect and promote people's mental health.

Mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression are highly prevalent in all countries and communities, affecting people of all ages and income levels. They represent the second biggest reason for long-term disability, contributing to loss of healthy life. They drive up health-care costs for affected people and families while inflicting substantial economic losses on a global scale.

The new findings published in two reports – [*World mental health today*](#) and [*Mental Health Atlas 2024*](#) – highlight some areas of progress while exposing significant gaps in addressing mental health conditions worldwide. The reports serve as critical tools to inform national strategies and shape global dialogue ahead of the [2025 United Nations High-Level Meeting on noncommunicable diseases and promotion of mental health and well-being](#), taking place in New York on 25 September 2025.

"Transforming mental health services is one of the most pressing public health challenges," said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. "Investing in mental health means investing in people, communities, and economies – an investment no country can afford to neglect. Every government and every leader has a responsibility to act with urgency and to ensure that mental health care is treated not as a privilege, but as a basic right for all."

Key data from *World mental health today*

The report shows that while prevalence of mental health disorders can vary by sex, women are disproportionately impacted overall. Anxiety and depressive disorders are the most common types of mental health disorders among both men and women.

Suicide remains a devastating outcome, claiming an estimated 727 000 lives in 2021 alone. It is a leading cause of death among young people across all countries and socioeconomic contexts. Despite global efforts, progress in reducing suicide mortality is too low to meet the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of a one-third reduction in suicide rates by 2030. On the current trajectory, only a 12% reduction will be achieved by that deadline.

The economic impact of mental health disorders is staggering. While health-care costs are substantial, the indirect costs – particularly in lost productivity – are far greater. Depression and anxiety alone cost the global economy an estimated US\$ 1 trillion each year.

These findings underscore the urgent need for sustained investment, stronger prioritization, and multi-sectoral collaboration to expand access to mental health care, reduce stigma, and tackle the root causes of mental health conditions.

Key findings from the *2024 Mental Health Atlas*

Since 2020, countries have been making significant strides in strengthening their mental health policies and planning. Many have updated their policies, adopted rights-based approaches, and enhanced preparedness for mental

health and psychosocial support during health emergencies.

However, this momentum has not translated into legal reform. Fewer countries have adopted or enforced rights-based mental health legislation, and only 45% of countries evaluated laws in full compliance with international human rights standards.

The report reveals a concerning stagnation in mental health investment. Median government spending on mental health remains at just 2% of total health budgets – unchanged since 2017. Disparities between countries are stark; while high-income countries spend up to US\$ 65 per person on mental health, low-income countries spend as little as US\$ 0.04. The global median number of mental health workers stands at 13 per 100 000 people, with extreme shortages in low- and middle-income countries.

Reform and development of mental health services is progressing slowly. Fewer than 10% of countries have fully transitioned to community-based care models, with most countries still in the early stages of transition. Inpatient care continues to rely heavily on psychiatric hospitals, with nearly half of admissions occurring involuntarily and over 20% lasting longer than a year.

Integration of mental health into primary care is advancing, with 71% of countries meeting at least three of five WHO criteria. However, data gaps remain; only 22 countries provided sufficient data to estimate service coverage for psychosis. In low-income countries fewer than 10% of affected individuals receive care, compared to over 50% in higher-income nations – highlighting an urgent need to expand access and strengthen service delivery.

Encouragingly, most countries report having functional mental health

promotion initiatives such as early childhood development, school-based mental health and suicide prevention programmes. Over 80% of countries now offer mental health and psychosocial support as part of emergency responses, up from 39% in 2020. Outpatient mental health services and telehealth are becoming more available, though access remains uneven.

Global call to scale up action on mental health

While there have been some encouraging developments, the latest data shows that countries remain far off track to achieve the targets set in WHO's [Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan](#).

WHO calls on governments and global partners to urgently intensify efforts toward systemic transformation of mental health systems worldwide. This includes:

- **equitable financing of mental health services;**
- **legal and policy reform to uphold human rights;**
- **sustained investment in the mental health workforce; and**
- **expansion of community-based, person-centered care.**

Note for editors

The [World mental health today](#) publication is a timely update to the data chapter of the 2022 World Mental Health Report: Transforming Mental Health for All. As mental health transformation continues to be needed