

## Humanitarian Shelter and Mental Health: doing more and doing better

The first inter-sectoral Shelter and Health Learning Day, hosted by CENDEP, Oxford Brookes University and CARE International UK, was held in May 2020. Over 100 academics and practitioners from around the world working on development housing, health, humanitarian shelter and WaSH (water, sanitation and hygiene) shared knowledge about the links between housing (including humanitarian shelter in its many guises and contexts) and mental and physical health. These connections came to the forefront of the humanitarian Shelter and Settlements agenda in 2020, partly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic which highlighted the ways that inadequate and overcrowded shelters (homes) fail to protect people from communicable disease. This topic is also part of the growing recognition in the sector of the need to know more about, and evidence better, the wider impacts of shelter assistance (InterAction, 2020).

The Shelter and Health Learning Day report, [Towards Healthier Homes in Humanitarian Settings](#), was published in August 2020 and has had wide circulation within and beyond the humanitarian shelter sector.

**We are pleased to announce the second Shelter and Health Learning Event, over two half days in May/June 2021, which will have a focus on mental health.**

*Mental health affects us all. Mental health is a continuum, ranging from good mental health and wellbeing at one end, to substantial personal suffering and impairment at the other. Everyone has mental health, and mental, neurological, and substance use (MNS) conditions can affect anyone. Together, MNS conditions are the number one cause of years lived with disability (YLDs) worldwide and are responsible for at least 10% of all disability-adjusted life years (DALYs). One in four people will develop a mental health condition in their lifetime, and one in six is living with a neurological condition. The number of people living with MNS conditions is expected to increase dramatically in coming years as population sizes and life expectancies rise, especially in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).*

Ryan, G., Lemmi, V., Hanna, F., Loryman, H. and Eaton, J. (2019). [Mental Health for Sustainable Development: A Topic Guide for Development Professionals](#). K4D Emerging Issues Report. London and Brighton, UK: Mental Health Innovation Network and IDS.

Humanitarian shelter assistance can be perceived to be ‘just’ the provision of physical protection - it is overlooked as an enabler of broader positive outcomes and even early and resilient recovery, meaning that the potential of shelter to improve health has not been leveraged. In the GSC annual meeting in October 2020, UNHCR Chief of Shelter & Settlements, Brett Moore, stated that “the link between housing conditions, how people live, the built environment and health is now very clear...but really the understanding of the determinants between living conditions and health outcomes is underappreciated amongst humanitarians”. Health has recently been identified by the Strategic Advisory Group of the Global Shelter Cluster as one of its research priorities (Parrack, 2020). Convincing evidence that shelter programming can have beneficial outcomes is needed if donors are to understand the potential of shelter assistance to support and improve physical and mental health. This online event aims to start the process of building humanitarian shelter actors’ knowledge of the connections between their programming and mental health. Ultimately, co-developed guidance will enhance practice and help to address the emergency and transitional needs of affected populations.

We are calling for contributions to the Learning Event. We are keen to include practitioners’ positive and negative experiences of incorporating considerations of mental health in their programming. We would like to include diverse voices throughout the event. 10-minute presentations could be used to advocate for particular tools/methodologies, to share expertise or case studies and to identify future priorities.

**Please get in touch if you would like to make a presentation or moderate a discussion group.**

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## **Overview of the Learning Event:**

### **Session 1**

Session 1 will focus on information sharing and advocacy. Presentations from humanitarian and development experts in shelter, protection and mental health will explore the intersections between humanitarian shelter and mental health.

### **Session 2**

Session 2 will provide a platform for humanitarian shelter actors to discuss the entry points for incorporating mental health considerations into programming. Brief case studies will prompt sharing of practical ideas around programme assessments, implementation and monitoring/evaluation. Group discussions will be moderated by experienced practitioners.

The findings of the Learning Event will be used to identify opportunities for the Shelter and Settlements to do more and do better with respect to mental health.

### **Topics to be addressed in the Learning Event include:**

- What are we talking about? Mental Health terminology and the scope of the intersections between housing/shelter and mental health.  
One of the recommendations from the first Shelter and Health Learning Day was the need for a common language and shared understanding of mental health and well-being between humanitarian clusters.
- Intersections between living conditions, physical health and mental health (with attention to the particular impacts on women and girls and people with disabilities).
- Shelter's role in home/homemaking and (early) recovery.
- Therapeutic impacts of rebuilding and/or upgrading.
- Security/safety/privacy/dignity of humanitarian shelter and the links between shelter, protection and mental health.
- Programming entry points for mental health