Integrating mental health into primary care: 
A global perspective

This report on integrating mental health into primary care, developed jointly by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Organization of Family Doctors (Wonca), presents the justification and advantages of providing mental health services in primary care. It provides advice on how to implement and scale-up primary care. It provides advice on how to implement and scale-up primary care for mental health, and describes how a range of health systems have successfully undertaken this transformation.

Key messages

1. Mental disorders affect hundreds of millions of people and, if left untreated, create an enormous toll of suffering, disability and economic loss.
2. Despite the potential to successfully treat mental disorders, only a small minority of those in need receive even the most basic treatment.
3. Integrating mental health services into primary care is the most viable way of closing the treatment gap and ensuring that people get the mental health care they need.
4. Primary care for mental health is affordable, and investments can bring important benefits.
5. Certain skills and competencies are required to effectively assess, diagnose, treat, support and refer people with mental disorders; it is essential that primary care workers are adequately prepared and supported in their mental health work.
6. There is no single best practice model that can be followed by all countries. Rather, successes have been achieved through sensible local application of broad principles.
7. Integration is most successful when mental health is incorporated into health policy and legislative frameworks and supported by senior leadership, adequate resources, and ongoing governance.
8. To be fully effective and efficient, primary care for mental health must be coordinated with a network of services at different levels of care and complemented by broader health system development.
9. Numerous low- and middle-income countries have successfully made the transition to integrated primary care for mental health.
10. Mental health is central to the values and principles of the Alma Ata Declaration; holistic care will never be achieved until mental health is integrated into primary care.


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