

Baghdad, Iraq, 10 October 2020: Today, WHO Iraq Country Office joins the rest of the world to mark World Mental Health Day 2020. This year's theme is "Move for Mental Health: Let's Invest" to advocate for increased international and domestic financing for mental health and well-being.

We all agree that investment in mental health is urgently needed because, at one point in time, one in four people will be affected by a mental disorder. Iraq, like many other countries, spends on average only 2% of its health budget on mental health. Although, for every US\$ 1 invested in scaled-up treatment for common mental disorders such as depression and anxiety, there is a return of US\$ 5 in improved health and productivity.

On average, people in Iraq pay out-of-pocket at least 20% towards the cost of mental health services. The situation is worse for low-income households and other vulnerable groups as the cost of this essential care can cause financial hardship. However, when we attain universal health coverage, we will ensure that people affected by mental health issues are not left behind. Mental health needs in Iraq remain enormous. Although the government and partners have developed a national mental health strategy and plans, most people do not have access to quality mental health services.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought out, more than ever, how mental health is integral to overall well-being. Restrictions on movement and gathering, job losses, deaths of loved ones, and widespread COVID-19 infections have affected people's mental well-being. There are reports of upsurges in intimate partner violence and suicides, including among youth and adolescents. During this COVID-19 pandemic, WHO is working with the Government of Iraq, and with partners, to include mental health care as part of the continuity of essential health services. The Organization is also providing psychosocial support skills training for first responders.

Estimates globally show nine mental health workers per 100,000 people. In Iraq, this falls well below the global average to less than 2 per 100,000 people. Among this workforce, one third are non-professional workers, meaning there is a severe shortage of psychiatrists and psychologists.

WHO is working with the Government of Iraq to provide culturally appropriate, evidence-based, and community-based mental health and psychosocial support services to the most vulnerable

population groups. In this task-sharing strategy, primary health care workers are trained and then supervised in managing common mental disorders.

Today, WHO calls on partners and communities to promote social interventions by strengthening peer support, re-integrating long-stay patients into communities, and equipping caregivers with the knowledge and resources to better support people with mental disorders. I also call on employers to invest in staff wellness programmes and training in psychological first aid. WHO remains committed to responding to the mental health and psychosocial needs of the Iraqi people and will continue providing the needed support to scale up services to cope with emerging needs. WHO will continue to advocate for prioritizing mental health as an essential component of health services in Iraq.

Each and every one of us needs to maintain our mental health. We can all take some basic steps to improve this by getting plenty of sleep, eating healthy food, avoiding alcohol, exercising, socializing, and developing strategies to manage stress and anxiety. Finally, I ask every person to invest in your mental health and well-being and support those around you.

After all, there is no health without mental health!

For more information, please contact:

Pauline Ajello, Communications Officer, +964 7729 877 288, [ajellopa@who.int](mailto:ajellopa@who.int)

Ajyal Sultani, Communications Officer, +964 7740 892 878, [sultanya@who.int](mailto:sultanya@who.int)

Ms Baraa Shaba, Communications Officer, +964 780 001 0244, [Shabab@who.int](mailto:Shabab@who.int)

Thursday 9th of May 2024 08:08:47 PM