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Mental health of people with neglected tropical diseases

Towards a
person-centred
approach



World Health
Organization

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approach**

Mental health of people with neglected tropical diseases: towards a person-centred approach

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Recognizing the mental health needs of people with neglected tropical diseases


Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) frequently cause distress in affected people and their carers, because of both their direct impact and stigma and discrimination. For some people, distress can lead to more severe mental, neurological and social problems; distress may even lead to substance use as a means of coping or thoughts of self-harm or suicide. Effective ways of supporting affected people and their carers and addressing community stigma and discrimination should be appropriately considered in the health sector, as well as informal systems of care.

The main aims of this document are to call attention to the **mental health** needs of people affected by NTDs and to call for the use of psychosocial, pharmacological and educational interventions to address those needs. The wider aspiration is to raise awareness about the double burden of mental health conditions and NTDs and to advocate for a more person-centred approach. The document also highlights the importance of collaborative action and an integrated approach by policy-makers, funders, programme managers and health service providers to strengthen the profile of and investment in mental health in NTD programming.

The document is intended for national policy-makers and programme managers, relevant programme leads and staff in participating United Nations agencies, civil society and nongovernmental organizations working on NTDs, agencies that fund work on NTDs and mental health, health service providers, the academic and research community and people with these conditions and their carers.

KEY MESSAGES

- People with NTDs are at high risk for mental health conditions, and people with mental conditions are at higher risk of an NTD.
- Mental health and psychosocial well-being should be recognized as important in NTD work in view of the high levels of comorbidity and the impact on individual and community well-being.
- Mental health must be included in comprehensive, person-centred services and universal health coverage.
- Mental ill health strongly influences help-seeking behaviour and may affect physical outcomes in ways that directly compromise achievement of broader NTD goals.
- People with NTDs often experience severe stigma and discrimination, which may also negatively affect their mental health and their help-seeking behaviour.
- Practical guidelines are available for feasible, evidence-based interventions, which could be incorporated into NTD work.
- Mental health programmes and specialist services should work with and support NTD programmes in training, supervision and referral for people with severe or urgent mental health problems.



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