



**INNOVATION IN DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION:  
A WHO EXPERT SURVEY**



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This publication is part of a broader series of thematic papers, co-produced by the World Health Organization and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's Global Mental Health Platform. The series consists of four publications and covers the following topics.

- Innovation in deinstitutionalization: a WHO expert survey;
- Integrating the response to mental disorders and other chronic diseases in health care systems;
- Social determinants of mental health;
- Promoting Rights and Community Living of Children with Psychosocial Disabilities (forthcoming).

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## FOREWORD

Mental health is an integral and essential component of health, but is often neglected within national health policy and plans. As the awareness of the importance of mental health increases, international organizations—including the World Health Organization (WHO)—face the challenge of providing evidence-based guidance and good practices to assist countries in their mental health planning. The Gulbenkian Mental Health Platform and WHO have collaborated to generate information to help meet this challenge, in the form of a series of thematic papers on pressing mental health issues of our time. Topics were identified by the Platform’s advisory and steering committees, and prioritized based on the issue’s potential significance in making a substantial improvement in the global mental health situation. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that the topics of the thematic papers are highly consistent with the four key objectives of WHO’s Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020.

The topic of this thematic paper, *Innovation in deinstitutionalization: a WHO expert survey*, was chosen due to the urgent need for a radical shift in the way mental disorders are managed, away from long-term hospitalization and towards community-based mental health care. Despite decades of promoting deinstitutionalization, mental hospital-based care still dominates service delivery, consuming on an average more than 70% of the entire mental health budget in low- and middle-income countries. If deinstitutionalization is to start happening on a wider scale, it is imperative to understand how some mental health systems have been able to overcome the odds and successfully transform their services. This paper reports results of an expert survey and captures important lessons learnt from those who have been involved directly with deinstitutionalization and/or expanding community-based services.

One of the most interesting findings from the survey is the reported importance of political skill in fostering mental health reform. In this regard, the survey reveals that ‘innovation in deinstitutionalization’ is not so much a particular set or sequence of health policy-level interventions, or even a new way of managing people with long-term mental disorders, but rather, the ability to understand the motivation of local stakeholders and changing situational demands and to use that knowledge in strategic ways. Rethinking ‘innovation’ along these lines implies the need for greater investment in current and future mental health leaders in terms of building their capacity to use political skill to promote deinstitutionalization.

We trust that you will find this paper both thought provoking and useful, and we encourage you to read the accompanying thematic papers from this series, too.

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The project steering group members were Julian Eaton (chair; CBM International, Togo), José Miguel Caldas de Almeida (NOVA University of Lisbon, Portugal), John Mahoney (University of Melbourne, Australia), Shoba Raja (Basic Needs, India), Benedetto Saraceno (NOVA University of Lisbon, Portugal), and Gordon Shen (University of California at Berkeley, USA).

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All thematic papers were produced under the overall guidance of the Gulbenkian Global Mental Health Platform's Advisory and Steering Committees (below).

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