

DOLLARS, DALYs AND DECISIONS:

**ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF THE
MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM**



**World Health
Organization**

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MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM



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Executive Summary

Economic evidence for mental health action

A health systems perspective provides an integrated approach to the identification of information and evidence needs for the planning, provision and evaluation of mental health programmes. Some relevant messages from the economic dimension of this approach are:

- Information on the **burden of mental disorders**, whether expressed in economic or epidemiological terms (i.e. in Dollars or DALYs [disability-adjusted life years]), is a potentially influential measure of the relative magnitude of mental, neurological and substance abuse disorders at the population level, but is an insufficient basis for allocating resources and setting priorities for action / service development. To date, studies of the economic burden of these disorders using cost-of-illness methodology can be characterized by their variable quality and inconsistent approach to the identification, measurement and valuation of costs. For such studies to produce appropriate and comparable estimates of the true economic consequences of mental, neurological and substance abuse disorders in the future, a major rethink appears to be needed.
- Economic evaluation or **cost-effectiveness analysis** of existing service arrangements and current / new intervention strategies (including consideration of the amount of burden that can be avoided), is an integral part of mental health financing and mental health system evaluation, providing a check on unfair or inefficient practice and a basis for renewed action or investment. It is a necessary mechanism for identifying an efficient allocation of mental health resources (greatest gain for available resources), but an insufficient tool for setting overall priorities in the mental health system.
- For the broader process of **priority-setting** in mental health, the efficiency of particular interventions or their combination into service packages needs to be systematically weighed up against other objectives or goals of the mental health system - in particular fairness (with respect to geographical or financial access to services), poverty reduction

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