



health

Department:
Health
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MEDIA STATEMENT

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WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY COMMEMORATION – 10 OCTOBER 2020

Pretoria: As the country joins the rest of the global community in commemorating the World Mental Health Day on 10 October under the theme “Mental Health for all: Greater Investment – Greater Access”, the Department of Health urges individuals, families, communities, employers and all stakeholders to join the Department in its efforts to further strengthen the mental health system.

This year’s World Mental Health Day is commemorated in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic which has brought about a lot of physical, mental and socioeconomic anguish to all people worldwide.

The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the need for psychosocial support for people especially those infected and affected by the virus.

The World Mental Health Day is commemorated annually on October 10 to raise awareness on mental health, its causes and risk factors. The day is also used to combat stigma and discrimination against those living with mental disorders.

During this day we call upon each one of us, communities, service providers, researchers and academics to undertake and commit themselves to contribute towards the prevention of mental disorders as they are preventable.

We must ensure that people living with mental health problems can access good quality services to enable them to live with dignity.

The 2020 World Mental Health Day theme is a call to action for massive scale-up of investment on mental health programmes to redress the historic neglect of the programme and be ready for the new challenges that are constantly brought about by the changing world order and epidemiological transition.

This year’s commemoration comes at a time when our daily lives have changed considerably as a result of the pandemic, and we need to show compassion for fellow human beings irrespective of their material conditions.

We also need to support each other and even more to those who suffered the effects of the pandemic directly and indirectly, physically, mentally, economically and socially.

Special attention must be given to those in self-isolation and quarantine and those who had to bury their loved ones under difficult and unusual conditions and rules that had to be adopted to curb the spread.

Since the outbreak of Covid-19 many people have suffered mental health problems and disorders such as stress, depression, anxiety due to the immediate impact of the pandemic which include loss of family members and loss of income and physical isolation (self-isolation and quarantine) to contain the possible spread of the pandemic to their loved ones.

The frontline personnel across all sectors especially the health care workers have had to face unprecedented stress, risk and pressure whilst treating the infected individuals in isolation away from their families and frequently having to deal with the guilt of not being able to save all the lives!

The stigma and discrimination perpetrated against those infected by the virus together with their families is a sad reality that brings additional suffering and negatively affect their efforts to recover from their health and psychological conditions.

Individuals with mental health problems together with their families are often subjected to stigma, discrimination and victimisation, and this may scare most people from disclosing their conditions including Covid-19 status, something which may put the lives and health of those around them at huge risk.

According to the World Health Organization, mental health is one of the most neglected areas of public health and despite the impact of mental health conditions on individuals, families and society there has been little investment in mental health.

Countries spend on average only 2% of their health budgets on mental health programmes for treatment and prevention of mental health disorders. South Africa spends 5% of its health budget on mental health, though this is relatively better than other developing countries, but a lot still needs to be done to improve the situation.

It is estimated that four out of five people with serious mental disorders living in low and middle income countries do not receive mental health services that they need.

The effects of Covid-19 pandemic is expected to increase the need for mental and psychosocial support for the next few months if not years.

This means investment in mental health programmes is a matter of urgency which require the same attention and resources allocated to flatten the Covid-19 curve and other health emergencies.

The promotion of good mental health is not the sole responsibility of government, but every individual, community and organisation have a role to play to ensure the wellbeing of those around them.

In government, it is a responsibility of many departments including among others Education, Welfare, Safety and security and Labour.

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