



Joint Statement on the occasion of World Mental Health Day 2021

10 October 2021

The COVID19 pandemic has seen a significant increase in people seeking mental health services in the Maldives. As we mark World Mental Health Day we applaud the advocacy efforts carried out in the past few years by the mental health sector, including mental health professionals, government institutions, mental health service providers, CSOs and other stakeholders.

In keeping with the theme of World Mental Health Day 2021 - 'Mental Health for all: Let's make it a reality.', we call on the Government of Maldives to:

- Increase funding and resources to the mental health sector.
- Mandate hospitals to have a psychiatry department to qualify for the ranking of a tertiary hospital.
- Improve affordability of mental health services under Aasandha and other social protection schemes.
- Ensure that other sectors have the appropriate specialists to undertake the necessary evaluations for their institutions to lower the burden on the Center for Mental Health (CMH).
- Improve the pay structure of mental health professionals.
- Establish accountability mechanisms in order to protect mental health service seekers.
- Provide adequate training to front line workers to provide an empathetic environment of care for those seeking mental health services.

We note that against the advocacy efforts, provision of mental health services is disappointingly inadequate.

Greater Male' region: access to mental health services is extremely difficult. Services at private clinics are not fully covered under Aasandha. The only psychiatry department is at IGM Hospital which is also the only emergency psychiatry service provider in the Greater Malé region. IGM Hospital is one of four tertiary hospitals in the region. The Hospital currently stand at a months-long waiting line for mental health services.

Delays at the IGMH ER and unfamiliarity of front line workers at the hospital cause further stress for patients, resulting in many who are forced to avoid seeking help.

Outer regions: Although the tertiary hospital in G.Dh. Thinadhoo does not have psychiatry services, it is heartening that the tertiary hospitals in R. Ungoofaaru, H.Dh. Kulhudhuffushi and S. Hithadhoo currently have a consulting psychiatrist, while the one in L. Gan has two. We encourage the government to build on this progress and establish multi-disciplinary community based approaches to mental health care.



Under their mental health pledges, President Ibrahim Solih's government has allotted 5000 MVR per year per person under the state health insurance Aasandha, for mental health services. Acknowledging the provision of insurance for mental health services, we encourage the government to consider the reality of costs of basic mental health service in the Maldives, such as the fact that treatment costs are around MVR 500 per one hour session of therapy while mental health assessments costs are in the 1000s. Additional assistance is available under the National Social Protection Agency (NSPA), however, this comes with barriers such as the application processes and stringent requirements.

More worryingly, there are still shortages in psychiatry medications which can have detrimental effects on the mental and physical well-being of individuals who require regular medication for mental health illnesses.

Despite all of these barriers and systematic issues, we would like to acknowledge and thank the efforts of mental health professionals who are going above and beyond to improve and ensure access to mental health services with limited resources, to the best of their abilities.