Facts:

- 450 million people experience mental or neurological disorders around the world. These disorders constitute 5 of the 10 leading causes of disability worldwide, thus creating   devastating socioeconomic impact for individuals, families, and governments.
- Mental disorders can be diagnosed and treated cost-effectively.
- In many parts of the world, mental health is still not acknowledged as important and   remains a low health priority. Access to effective treatments is limited.

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

Mental Health Policy

© World Health Organization, 2003

What are mental health policies? Why are they important?

Mental health policies define a vision for the future, which in turn helps to establish benchmarks for the prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation of mental disorders, and the promotion of mental health in the community. Mental health policies are important because they coordinate, through a common vision and plan, all programmes and services related to these objectives. Without this type of organization, programmes and services are likely to be inefficient and fragmented.

Mental Health outcomes are optimized when:

- Mental health is an essential component of public health
- Government policies and actions protect and promote the mental health and well-being of its peoples
- Services are appropriate, accountable, accessible, and equitable
- People are treated in the least restrictive and intrusive manner

Why have a project focused on mental health policy and service development?

A paradoxical situation is emerging, worldwide. As scientific evidence mounts concerning the cause, course, and consequences of mental disorders, and new treatments are emerging that can make real differences in the lives of sufferers, most people with mental disorders do not receive even the most basic treatment, and suffer from stigma and dis-crimination. National policies and programmes in mental health are urgently needed to change this situation, yet over 40% of countries have no mental health policy, and over 30% have no men-tal health programme.   The majority of coun-tries' mental health budget constitutes less than 1% of their total health expenditures.
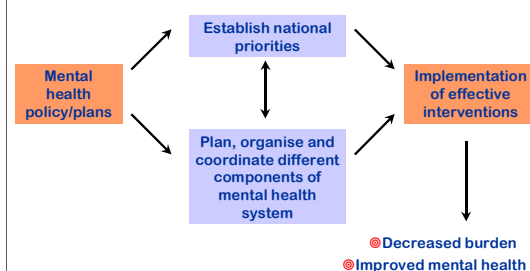
WHO Mental Health Policy Project

A Mental Health Policy Project has been created by WHO's Department of Mental Health and Substance Dependence. A Guidance Package is being developed, which consists of a series of prac-tical, inter-related modules, designed to address a wide variety of issues pertaining to mental health policy and service development. The Guidance Package will serve as a framework for assisting countries to create policies and services and then put them into practice, which, in turn, will lead to improved mental health care, treatment and pro-motion.

Importance of mental health policies and plans

Key areas of work

- To develop a guidance package for mental health policy reform, covering context, advocacy, legislation and human rights, policy and plans, financing, planning and budgeting for services, organization of services, quality improvement, access and use of psychotropic medicines, child and adolescent mental health, human resources and training, mental health information systems and indicators.

- To assist countries in reforming mental health policies, plans and services.

- To enhance the capacity of countries to manage mental health issues over the long-term.

Key Contacts

Dr B. Saraceno
World Health Organization
Tel: +41-22-791 3603
Fax: +41-22-791 4160
Email: saracenob@who.int

Dr M. Funk
World Health Organization
Tel: +41-22-791 3855
Fax: +41-22-791 4160
Email: funkm@who.int

http://www.who.int/mental_health/topics.html