

70th Session of the Regional Committee of WHO for Eastern Mediterranean region 9–12 October 2023, Cairo, Egypt.

EM/RC70/INF.DOC.3 Item 2 D Provisional Agenda. Scaling up mental health care: a framework for action.

Distinguished members of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean,

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) commends WHO's ongoing commitment to scaling up mental health care in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. However, we would like to raise a significant concern: the alarming shortage of mental health nurses in the region, as highlighted in both the WHO Mental Health Atlas 2020 and the ICN report, "The Global Mental Health Nursing Workforce: Time to prioritize and invest in mental health and wellbeing." This deficiency stands below the global average and has profound implications for Universal Health Coverage.

The Special Rapporteur's report to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/44/48) underscores the need for a human rights approach to mental health care. Respecting and upholding human rights not only promotes the well-being and dignity of individuals but also tackles the stigma and discrimination associated with mental health. A sufficient number of adequately prepared nurses and mental health nurses is paramount in ensuring the provision of person-centred, rights-based care.

Therefore, we urge Member States to:

1. **Invest in mental health nursing:** Elevating the importance and visibility of the mental health nursing workforce is crucial. This includes increased funding for nursing education, particularly in specialized mental health care.
2. **Invest in nursing education and continuing professional development (CPD):** It is crucial to embed competency-based education within undergraduate programmes, including both theoretical knowledge and practical clinical experience in mental health. Further, supporting CPD in mental health is essential. This not only reinforces a human rights-based approach but also ensures that care is both evidence-based and person-centred, leading to improved health outcomes.
3. **Improve access to care:** ICN strongly supports transitioning from an institutional based model to an integrated community-based model. Investing in and prioritizing

local nurses and future nurses to work in these areas will be an essential strategy in making this a reality.

4. **Combat stigma and discrimination:** Stigma, which is pervasive in the general population and in the health sector, is a major barrier to improved mental health services and self-care. Nurses as the most trusted health professionals, have vital roles in combating stigma and discrimination in mental health. ICN supports the WHO QualityRights e-training on mental health, rewarding nurses who engage in this professional development activity with International Continuing Education Credits.
5. **Collaborate with ICN:** ICN is dedicated to the global advancement of nursing, with a significant focus on mental health. We invite Member States to leverage our resources, insights and expertise, particularly with the lens of our recent report, to bolster mental health nursing in the region.

By strengthening the mental health nursing workforce, we can ensure that care is not only accessible but also compassionate, evidence-based and rights-oriented. This investment is not just an economic or professional necessity; it is a profound commitment to the health, dignity and human rights of every individual in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

Thank you.

Link: ICN 2022, The Global Mental Health Nursing Workforce: Time to prioritize and invest in Mental Health and Wellbeing - https://www.icn.ch/sites/default/files/2023-04/ICN_Mental_Health_Workforce_report_EN_web.pdf