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ICN says disruption to mental health services as a result of COVID-19 and historic underfunding must be addressed immediately

Geneva, Switzerland, 5 October 2020 – The World Health Organization’s (WHO) survey of mental health services during the pandemic has revealed a shocking amount of disruption, underfunding and neglect of Mental Health services.

The [WHO survey](#) suggests that critical mental health services have been disrupted or halted in 93% of the 130 countries it surveyed, at a time when demand is increasing.

In more than 80% of the countries there has been no additional funding for mental health services, and only half have the continuity of mental health services as part of their pandemic plans.

ICN Chief executive officer Howard Catton said the results reflected the decades-long neglect of mental health services that many countries have allowed to continue.

“These results are truly shocking. Mental health services have always been vital in the provision of total person care, which is care that recognises the importance of treating the whole person.

‘But they have always been seen as a ‘Cinderella service,’ one that is vital but not recognised as part of ‘real’ healthcare, and have consequently been chronically underfunded and marginalised.

‘In many countries the idea that there is “no physical health without mental health” is mere rhetoric. Proper mental healthcare requires adequate funding and the political will to invest in essential services

‘Whatever a person’s situation, whether they have been locked down for months and are suffering anxiety or depression, or whether they have endured the loss of a loved one and the trauma of not being able to be with them in their last moments, the pandemic has highlighted that good mental health is as important as good physical health.

‘In addition, our [recent report](#) highlighted the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of the healthcare workforce. Nursing during the COVID-19 pandemic will have consequences for nurses, including on their mental health, and some of them may be with us for a long time after the virus has gone.

‘To help end this crisis in mental healthcare nurses can provide the holistic care that is needed, but they may need to receive additional training and the technological means to support people in a socially distanced manner.

‘Now is the time to harness the power of nurses to help solve these issues and build better health systems that really do address all the needs of the people they serve.’”

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Note to Editors

The **International Council of Nurses** (ICN) is a federation of more than 130 national nurses associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses and leading nursing internationally, ICN works to ensure quality care for all and sound health policies globally.

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