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# UNITED FOR GLOBAL MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY

2024-2026

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HEALTH

## UNITED FOR GLOBAL MENTAL HEALTH 2024-2026 STRATEGY<sup>1</sup>

Since United for Global Mental Health (UnitedGMH) was established in 2018 the world has changed in many ways. Mental health is now being talked about far more than before, often because of rising rates of mental ill health, but also as a positive result of our partners' advocacy and campaigning. A significant number of countries have enacted new laws, policies and approaches to improve the mental health and wellbeing of their citizens. We have been proud to work with those who have successfully achieved these changes in a wide range of countries and to have helped drive mental health up the global political and financial agenda.

But the world still has a long way to go. The right of everyone to good mental health is not enshrined in law in every country. In some countries, suicidal behaviour remains a crime punishable by fines or even imprisonment. Even in places where there is adequate legislation, most people at risk of or living with mental health conditions still struggle to find the support they need, depriving them of their right to good mental health. Political and financial support for mental health is often far lower than for physical health, yet the two are inseparable. The loud calls from young people to have their mental health prioritised are heard but not always acted upon. The mental health workforce is far too small to cope with the demands on it. Mental health is not adequately considered in how we respond to crises caused by conflict or natural disasters. Stigma and discrimination remain widespread.

These are challenges we were established to address. We have made progress in the past few years but our job is far from complete. Over the past three years – the period of our 2021-2023 strategy – further challenges have also arisen, with critically important implications for mental health now and in the future. From the threats to our environment to the positive and negative impacts of the media and technology, we have taken stock of what the future of mental health could look like and what that means for our work.

The result is this new three-year strategy, 2024-2026. In developing it, we talked to our stakeholders to see what they consider to be our core strengths. Crucially, they see the breadth of our network as unparalleled. They highlighted our approach and our core activities as follows:

- **Our approach:** our neutrality; being expert-led (including by people with lived experience); the diversity of our team; our focus on implementation and support; and the way we effectively link our global and national work to drive change with partners.
- **Our core activities:** our unique expertise in advocacy, policy and financing; the delivery of high-impact work; the amount of new finance we are driving into mental health; the way we create platforms that allow multiple stakeholders to connect and collaborate; and recruiting new players to mental health from outside the mental health sector to fund and promote the issue.

<sup>1</sup>The term 'global mental health' can be defined as the sector of policy, practice and research that aims to lessen mental suffering worldwide through the prevention, care and treatment of mental and substance-use disorders, and good mental health promotion. Put simply, the goal of the global mental health sector is to improve the mental health of all individuals around the world, through an equitable approach. We use the term 'global mental health' to refer not just to research and practice at a global level, but also at national level, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), and we seek to promote the issue accordingly.

# 24 TO 26 STRATEGY

## ENABLING ECOSYSTEMS

- Young people's mental health is prioritised
- Mental health is an integral part of adapting to, mitigating, and addressing loss to climate change and other environmental crises
- Increased and improved finance for mental health in all policies
- Timely, representative, good-quality data on mental health
- Positive online environments for mental health and wellbeing

## FIELD BUILDING

- Stronger amplification of the voices of advocates from low- and middle-income countries and people with lived experience
- Improved coordination and strengthened capacity of the global mental health community
- Organisations working in health and related ecosystems have improved knowledge and integrated strategies to advocate for better mental health

To live in a world that we want and need, UnitedGMH will work towards these strategic objectives

### PROTECTED MENTAL HEALTH RIGHTS

- Rights-based and non-discriminatory mental health legislation
- Deinstitutionalised mental health care
- Suicide decriminalised

### IMPROVED MENTAL HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS

- High quality, rights-based, integrated person-centred services and support free from stigma and discrimination
- Well-resourced health workforces delivering mental health services across healthcare systems

### OUR GOAL

A world where everyone, everywhere has someone to turn to in support of their mental health



## UNITEDGMH SUCCESS

Operating under our 2021-2023 strategy, UnitedGMH strived to create change around the world that would directly lead to a positive impact on people's lives. UnitedGMH sees the global and national mental health sectors as interdependent.

We have focused on these core areas:



Throughout the past three years, we led and contributed to positive change through successful advocacy, including:

- **Helping secure additional financing and political support for child, youth and caregiver mental health.** UnitedGMH helped Fondation Botnar and Grand Challenges Canada develop and launch the Being initiative. It is a multi-million dollar fund focused on improving young people's mental health in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) by scaling up youth-led mental health innovations, advocacy and research. As a convener, UnitedGMH has bridged the gap between global stakeholders and national youth advocates, positioning youth experts on panels alongside world leaders at global events such as the PMNCH Global Forum for Adolescents, Women Deliver, and the 78th United Nations General Assembly.
- **Upholding human rights: supporting the decriminalisation of suicide in Pakistan, Ghana, Malaysia and Guyana.** Partners used UnitedGMH's flagship 2021 report Decriminalising Suicide: Saving Lives. Reducing Stigma to drive their advocacy. UnitedGMH also supported them with policy position papers, by engaging with their policymakers and generating mental health coverage in regional and global media outlets such as Al Jazeera and the Guardian. The Suicide Working Group of the Global Mental Health Action Network (GMHAN) also played a key role in enabling members to liaise with each other, share learning and use progress in other countries with similar cultural contexts to advocate for change in their own countries. This work has gained public recognition, including in the Ghanaian parliament when the national bill to decriminalise suicide was passed.

- **Persuading the world's largest public health fund, The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, to incorporate mental health into its five-year strategy for the first time.** It was a move that allowed national health systems to invest hundreds of millions of dollars to integrate mental health into their HIV and TB approaches. UnitedGMH worked with Global Fund board members to ensure the five-year strategy meaningfully included mental health and the Global Fund Secretariat staff had the latest information on mental health, HIV and TB integration. By establishing and coordinating a group of key UN agencies and bilateral donors, UnitedGMH has helped national governments, UN agencies, service providers and civil society in tens of countries to integrate mental health into national Global Fund-funded HIV and TB programmes. This activity is helping raise millions of dollars for mental health.
- **Working closely with more than 50 UN member states to ensure mental health features more than ever before in new UN General Assembly resolutions, and other global non-mental-health-specific political processes** such as G7 and G20 summits, the 2023 UNGA High-Level Meetings on Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response, TB and Universal Health Coverage, and World Health Assemblies.
- **Expanding the mental health field through the exponential growth of the Global Mental Health Action Network (GMHAN).** Through GMHAN's extensive membership base (now over 3,400 members), global reach (with members from 147 countries), and access to experts, GMHAN has become a leading force in advancing mental health awareness and action. The Mental Health for All webinar series and annual convenings catalyse knowledge-sharing, and the dissemination of emerging mental health data and research.



We will continue to work in this way. We are clear that what is required is not just a flow of ideas or even funds from the global to the national level. Rather, we believe strongly that national partners and the experiences of people, especially in LMICs, need to be fully accounted for in international discussions and decision-making. Our role is to identify global opportunities that can help catalyse national change and to help national and grassroots civil society organisations access these opportunities at the global level. Finding ways for civil society, and in particular people with lived experience of mental ill health, to influence key decision-making processes is at the heart of UnitedGMH's mission.



## UNITEDGMH'S NEW STRATEGY

Our new strategy for the period January 2024 to December 2026 is an evolution, not a revolution. Our vision remains "a world where everyone, everywhere has someone to turn to for their mental health."

Since we were established, we have tried very hard to be mindful of the rest of the mental health sector. In our last strategy, we explained that we both unite, incubate and advocate. This remains the case



### WE UNITE

Working with campaigners, practitioners, national organisations, businesses, people with lived experience, funders, researchers, governments and international bodies so that they can learn, collaborate and make greater progress together.



### WE INCUBATE

Designing and setting up the initiatives with partners that will make the most impact on global mental health and help them to grow.



### WE ADVOCATE

Identifying where there is a need for financial and political progress, gathering technical insight, finding opportunities to encourage positive change, and working with others to achieve success.

#### Examples of this work include:

- incubating the **Global Business Collaboration for Better Workplace Mental Health** and the Being initiative on adolescent mental health
- uniting stakeholders to develop the data dashboard and report for the **Lancet Global Mental Health Countdown 2030**
- advocating for greater funding for mental health nationally by working with the **Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria**

Looking forward, we will continue to address the challenges we were established to take on. These include upholding people's rights to good mental health, to access services and support, and to live free of stigma and discrimination. We will continue working to increase funding and political support for rights-based mental health support and to grow the mental health field, particularly through the GMHAN.

However, we are also aware of the changing world and its impact on mental health. So our new strategy looks at the ecosystem of mental health and includes issues such as environmental crises and the role of media and technology.

As with our previous strategy, we are clear we will not achieve success alone. This strategy sets out how we will work and who we intend to work with. It is a summary underpinned by detailed project planning.





## THE FOUR PILLARS

In our new three-year strategy, our projects sit under four pillars: mental health rights; mental and physical health systems; the mental health ecosystem; and mental health field building. We are excited to be taking our work beyond the health sector, to embrace new challenges, while doubling down on our areas of success.

# 01 RIGHTS

The World Health Organisation (WHO) constitution, as well as several UN declarations on human rights, guarantee the right of everyone to the highest attainable standard of mental health. However, legislation and policy on mental health in many countries fall short of laying the foundations to achieve this. Human rights violations, as well as accessibility issues, are particularly prevalent where:

- **institutional care is prioritised over primary and community-based care**
- **discriminatory legislation, such as laws that criminalise suicidal behaviour, exist.**

Civil society, with the support of international organisations, needs to push for **rights-based legislation** and policy that promotes mental health. They must sensitise policymakers to the importance of mental health and ensure people with lived experience of mental health conditions are leading voices in demanding their rights. UnitedGMH will continue to support organisations with the necessary resources and opportunities to accomplish this. And, garnering support from international organisations working on human rights, we will continue to advocate at the global level for UN member states to commit to enacting rights-based laws.

The **institutionalisation of mental health care** continues to infringe on the rights of people with mental health conditions. It also takes up on average 67% of all mental health financing in low-income countries. We will provide our civil society partners with evidence and technical support to bolster their calls for the:

- **deinstitutionalisation of mental health care**
- **safeguarding of the legal rights of people with mental health conditions**
- **securing of their reintegration into the community**
- **right legal framework to support families and caregivers.**

To supplement these national-level calls, we will sustain global pressure. We'll push for further international commitment towards deinstitutionalisation and encourage calls from international human rights organisations to address the human rights violations caused by the institutionalisation of mental health care.

The effectiveness of primary and community-level mental health care depends on whether these services are used. As long as at least 23 countries continue to criminalise suicide under common law, those most in need of mental health services won't use them for fear of legal consequences and heightened stigma. We have worked to support the **decriminalisation of suicide** in Guyana, Ghana, Pakistan and Malaysia in the last couple of years. We will continue to extend support to civil society partners working on this issue in other countries, through:

- **evidenced literature**
- **publicly highlighting the issue**
- **convening organisations**
- **creating opportunities for national partners to engage their policymakers on the issue and create national champions.**

**Decriminalisation** is the first step towards robust **suicide prevention** efforts. So we will support our national partners and complement the work of international organisations such as WHO and Lifeline International in advocating for national suicide prevention strategies as part of national mental health legislation and policy. We will push for progress on this to be tracked through the WHO Mental Health Atlas data and our own periodically updated report on countries that criminalise suicide.





## 02 HEALTH SYSTEMS

The parity of mental and physical health should be recognised by **integrating mental health across all healthcare systems**. Integrating mental health services into primary care is the most efficient and effective way to close the treatment gap and ensure that all people get the mental health services they need.

UnitedGMH will continue advocating for high-quality, rights-based, integrated and person-centred mental health services. Building on the success of our work to integrate mental health in universal health coverage and HIV and TB programming, we will continue these efforts to drive positive change at national level, working with international and national partners including bilateral and multilateral donors, national governments and civil society groups. We want to see policies promoting integration and significantly more international and national financing to address mental health needs in these areas by 2026.

We will expand our work to press for better integration in programmes addressing **non-communicable diseases (NCDs)**, particularly given the important political opportunity of the High-Level Meeting on NCDs and Mental Health in 2025. We will work with the NCD Alliance and other key allies to drive greater progress in this area. And we will develop our work with partners to integrate mental health into **sexual and reproductive health**, so people receive the support they need at all levels of care, particularly primary care.

To underpin our rights-based work on **deinstitutionalisation**, it is also essential we continue advocating to shift mental health financing from tertiary institutions to primary and community-based care. This redistribution of resources will help ensure that mental health services are accessible to everyone, regardless of where they live or their socioeconomic status. It is imperative that mental health and psychosocial services are readily available closest to where people are, even in times of emergency.

The redistribution of health services will demand we expand our efforts into a new area of focus for us: the **mental health workforce**. Accessible, timely and high-quality mental health services – both pharmacotherapeutic and psychotherapeutic – must be delivered by a workforce adequately trained and equipped to provide them.

We will look to foster collaboration among governments, international organisations and mental health stakeholders to develop comprehensive plans and policies to address workforce shortages.

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# 03 ECOSYSTEMS

Mental health is increasingly seen not solely as a set of bio-medical conditions, but as stemming from the world we inhabit – our ecosystem – and how we experience it throughout our lives. Many factors within an individual's ecosystem potentially affect their mental health to a greater or lesser degree. UnitedGMH has chosen to focus on five aspects of our ecosystem where we feel we have a unique role to play and can make the most difference during 2024-26. These are:

- **our changing environment**
- **the particular needs of young people**
- **the impact of media and technology**
- **the lack of mental health data**
- **the financial resources available for mental health services.**

## THE CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

Growing evidence indicates that the **planetary crisis** is having a detrimental effect on people living with or at risk of mental health problems. This is a matter of increasing concern to our partner organisations. Protecting the mental health of people and communities needs to be an integral part of adapting to and mitigating climate change and other environmental crises. Mental health and environmental advocates must work together to build greater evidence and awareness of the impact of the environmental crisis on mental health, with a particular focus on the communities most affected by climate change. Together with global and national partners, including the Global Climate and Health Alliance, the Climate Action Network, Wellcome and Climate x Health, we will play a role in bringing these different advocates together for collective action. We will advocate for those with the necessary power, such as governments, to include mental health as a core part of their climate change adaptation and mitigation plans, and in relevant policies on other environmental threats, such as pollution and biodiversity loss. We will push for these plans to be properly financed.

## THE NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Until recently **child, adolescent and young people's mental health** was a neglected area, even within mental health, for which expertise and services were sorely lacking. However, this is rapidly changing. Today, we know half of mental health conditions begin by the age of 14 and mental health conditions in people aged 10-19 years account for 16% of the global burden of disease. Using policy instruments that prioritise young people's mental health, we can start to

tackle this problem. Thankfully, young people want to talk about mental health: they are often their own strongest advocates. UnitedGMH will continue to press the international community and national governments to commit to improving young people's mental health. We will call on them to provide opportunities for young people to act as key experts in shaping the growing global mental health sector. We will continue to seek out and create mechanisms and platforms for youth mental health champions, including people with lived experience, to advocate directly for better mental health. A key focus will remain our role as a core partner in the Being initiative, alongside Fondation Botnar, Grand Challenges Canada and the governments of the UK and Canada.

## THE IMPACT OF MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY

Careless **media** reporting and unmoderated online spaces can perpetuate mental health stigma and discrimination, and lead to mental ill health. Across the world, there has been significant recent growth in media reporting of and discussion about mental health, both positive and negative, and this is set to continue. Harmful internet use is well-documented. Media and tech companies have a responsibility to create positive online environments to promote mental health and wellbeing. Building on our work as part of the Lancet Commission on Ending Stigma and Discrimination in Mental Health and the Lancet Commission on Problematic Internet Usage, we will support the WHO and other global organisations and national partners to:

- **ensure the successful implementation of globally recognised mental health reporting standards by the media**
- **advocate for responsible and balanced media reporting on mental health**
- **join others in calling for social media and technology companies to commit to safer mental health platforms and responsible information sharing.**





## THE LACK OF MENTAL HEALTH DATA

The current lack of timely, comprehensive and accurate **data** on mental health is a recognised problem in low-income and lower-middle-income countries. So is the scarcity of credible indicators for monitoring progress. Without good-quality data, we cannot make the best decisions, drive progressive policy change, or hold decision-makers to account. Building on our work to develop and launch the Lancet Countdown on Global Mental Health 2030, we will encourage the increased generation and use of mental health data to inform national and global decisions.

And through the GMHAN we will support coordinated advocacy efforts to strengthen global monitoring and accountability on mental health, including within non-mental-health-focused accountability mechanisms such as human development indices. This work is particularly important as the international community begins discussions on what comes after the Sustainable Development Goals and how to better integrate mental health in future measurements of global and national progress.

## FUNDING FOR MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

The best mental health policies are redundant without the money to implement them. There is an annual global mental health **financing gap** of over US\$200bn, which has not narrowed in recent years despite increasing political engagement with the issue. More and improved finance for mental health in all policies is urgently needed. UnitedGMH will work in two areas: domestic finance (the money governments spend on their citizens), and donor finance for mental health. If domestic finance is to increase, governments need to prioritise mental health across all of their expenditure, not just within health budgets.

Mental health should be included in medium- and long-term government planning – something we will support national civil society to encourage their governments to do. Internationally, the most sustainable funding for mental health will come from existing finance mechanisms. We will continue to advocate for the integration of mental health into the investments of multilateral, bilateral and philanthropic finance. This will increase donor mental health funding that is coordinated with existing quality initiatives, and catalyse more. One key way to achieve this is to push donors to integrate mental health into aid strategies, and then to deliver on their commitments.



# 04 FIELD BUILDING

The number of organisations working on mental health is increasing exponentially. We can harness this positive development to maximise impact through collaboration and shared learning. And we can ensure there is no duplication by remaining clear about where our work is adding unique value in the mental health space and beyond. Our core mission is ‘field building’: we want to grow the overall number and impact of those seeking to advance better mental health for all. As new players enter the space, we are often called on to help guide them on what is happening in global mental health and who is working on what. The field does not just constitute those who work directly in mental health, but also those whose efforts can positively impact mental health. This is a key part of what makes what we do distinct from other organisations and networks.

Our core contribution to field building is in the area of advocacy: ensuring that the voices of people with lived experience and LMICs are heard in decision-making at every level – from local and national to international. As its founding organisation and secretariat, we have exponentially increased the size and reach of the **GMHAN** – the only global mental health advocacy network of its kind – over the past three years.

**Today, it is a community of more than 3,400 members from 147 countries, connecting to support one another to successfully advocate for change.**

The **GMHAN** has its own strategy that UnitedGMH, as the secretariat, helps the network’s members develop and implement. A key part of this is to ensure members are informed about the latest developments in mental health around the world and can connect with one another to inspire action. We will continue to build the **GMHAN** as the world’s leading advocacy network for mental health – strengthening the advocacy skills of its members and providing opportunities to work together to achieve national and global change.

We will continue to improve our ability to work in different languages and to disseminate information on a range of topics to the mental health community to help them in their work. We will try to encourage stakeholders from outside the area of mental health to join us, whether they are part of the health sector or other sectors. In all of our work, we will try to make sure that the voices of people with lived experience of mental health conditions and those living in LMICs are heard and their views taken into account in international processes and activities, so that global mental health is truly global.





## OUR APPROACH

During our evolution, we purposely moved away from campaigns, which are resource-intensive, and towards policy and advocacy. We believe this will help us achieve the same, if not greater impact, with fewer resources. We seek to work with decision-makers to help guide their approach, provide space for learning, and create platforms for other CSOs and people with lived experience to be heard.

Under our new strategy, we will become more strategic in how and when we communicate. We aim to make our global advocacy work come to life through telling stories about real people, and by finding ways to simplify complex issues. We will use existing platforms to increase our influence within the global mental health community, build trust and credibility with our current and future donors through engaging and impact-led storytelling. And we will place greater emphasis on engaging global media outlets with our research and analysis.

We are clear that what is required is not just a flow of ideas or even funds from the global to the national level. Rather, we believe strongly that national partners and the experiences of people, especially in LMICs, need to be fully accounted for in international discussions and decision-making.

UnitedGMH has developed relationships with a wide range of other international and national CSOs. We are not a donor: we want more funds to flow directly to our partners, especially in LMICs. However, one way we have helped drive investment to national partners is to contract with them to deliver shared objectives and then to provide them with funds and in-kind support to do so. This has helped drive policy change and inspired donors to invest directly in our partners. We will continue this model of contracting national partners through our different pillars of work.

## HOW UNITEDGMH WORKS

Under our last strategy, UnitedGMH became a leaner and more effective advocacy organisation by hiring talented staff based across the world, including staff recruited from our national partner organisations. We successfully increased the size of the GMHAN and achieved notable national and global advocacy success during the previous strategy period. The feedback we have received about the quality and focus of our work has been very positive, and we intend to build on what we've achieved so far.

UnitedGMH is a good place to work, and continues to improve: professional systems and processes have been installed; a more diverse workforce recruited; responsibilities and opportunities have been decentralised; kindness is the unofficial ethos. UnitedGMH now aims to be a brilliant place to work, with a coherent and simple set of systems (people/HR, finance, risk, culture tools, IT etc) and good internal communication, underpinned by a positive, progressive and clearly defined culture.

We are financially secure, and remain donor-informed, but not donor-led. We understand the importance of creating a healthy donor funding pipeline and the need to invest time and energy into leveraging, researching and identifying new donor partnership opportunities. We are working hard to build even stronger relationships with our existing donors, and develop new ones at the same time. This will help us grow the funds for mental health as a whole, rather than primarily for UnitedGMH, and that will remain a key part of our approach in 2024-26.

UnitedGMH for Global Mental Health is governed by a UK board and supported by the US-based board of the American Friends of United for Global Mental Health. We are very grateful for the advice and guidance of our boards and of all the stakeholders that we work with.

## LOOKING AHEAD

The UnitedGMH team, the trustees of UnitedGMH and the American Friends of UnitedGMH are very proud of all the organisation has achieved. We set out to make the case for mental health to be prioritised for political and financial support. In the last few years, we have worked hard with our partners, leading to better policies, more money and greater acknowledgement in a wide range of global and national processes.

The next chapter is about reinforcing the importance of mental health – using global moments such as the UN High-Level Meeting on NCDs and Mental Health – and involving ourselves more deeply in the processes that can best help make good mental health possible globally, nationally and locally. Hence our choice to work on rights, health systems, ecosystems and field building: all these areas build on our core strengths in advocacy and will help us connect advocacy to impact on the ground. Continuing to diversify our team and their skills and experiences will help us support our national and international partners most effectively.

**In the next three years, the world will change. We have designed this strategy to enable us to meet those changes as we strive for the highest possible standard of mental health for all.**

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