

2026 United Nations High-Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS: Integrating Mental Health into the HIV Response

The 2026 United Nations High-Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS takes place at a critical juncture. The global HIV response has undergone substantial change, influenced by shifting funding patterns and mounting pressures. The Global AIDS Strategy 2026–2031 sets out an ambitious vision rooted in people-centered, rights-based approaches and integrated systems. Evidence clearly shows that the **prevention and treatment of mental ill-health reduce HIV infection rates and support the overall health of those affected by HIV.**¹ To achieve these goals, the Political Declaration must explicitly acknowledge and embed mental health as a fundamental element of the HIV response. Without this integration,² progress toward equity, access, and long-term sustainability will remain limited.

What do we mean by integrating mental health into the HIV response?

- Making mental health as important as physical health care for people living with, at risk of and affected by HIV.
- Embedding mental health interventions across the full HIV continuum: prevention, testing, treatment and long-term care.
- Ensuring coordinated action and accountability across HIV, mental health and broader health and social systems.

Why Mental Health Matters: Arguments for integrating mental health into the HIV response

Health: Mental health conditions are both drivers and consequences of HIV, increasing vulnerability and undermining outcomes across the prevention and care continuum.^{2,3} They reduce testing and treatment uptake, weaken adherence to antiretroviral therapy (ART) and lower viral suppression.^{4,5} Evidence shows that integrating mental health services improves adherence, retention in care and overall outcomes.⁶ Without addressing mental health, global HIV targets will not be met.

Economic: Investing in mental health improves health outcomes, reduces long-term care costs and increases productivity.⁷ Integration strengthens health systems, reduces inefficiencies, and enhances the sustainability of HIV responses.⁸ Mental health interventions are relatively cheap.

Rights-based and social: Access to mental health care is a fundamental human right.⁹ Addressing mental health reduces stigma, improves quality of life and ensures more equitable, inclusive, and people-centred HIV services, especially for key populations and other priority populations most affected by HIV.

¹ United for Global Mental Health. Bending the curve: The impact of integrating mental health services on HIV and TB outcomes. Published June 2021.

² Collins PY, Vellozo J, Concepcion T, Oseso L, Chwastiak L, Kemp CG, Simoni J, Wagenaar BH. Intervening for HIV prevention and mental health: a review of global literature. *J Int AIDS Soc.* 2021 Jun;24 Suppl 2(Suppl 2):e25710. doi: 10.1002/jia2.25710.

³ Thornicroft G, Ahuja S, Barber S, et al. Integrated care for people with long-term mental and physical health conditions in low-income and middle-income countries. *Lancet Psychiatry.* 2019;6(2):174-186. doi:10.1016/S2215-0366(18)30298-0

⁴ Uthman OA, Magidson JF, Safren SA, Nachega JB. Depression and adherence to antiretroviral therapy in low-, middle- and high-income countries: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Curr HIV/AIDS Rep.* 2014;11(3):291-307. doi:10.1007/s11904-014-0220-1

⁵ Remien RH, Stirratt MJ, Nguyen N, Robbins RN, Pala AN, Mellins CA. Mental health and HIV/AIDS: the need for an integrated response. *AIDS.* 2019;33(9):1411-1420. doi:10.1097/QAD.0000000000002227

⁶ Integration of mental health and HIV interventions. Key considerations. Geneva: Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and the World Health Organization; 2022. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

⁷ Patel V, Saxena S, Lund C, et al. The Lancet Commission on global mental health and sustainable development. *Lancet.* 2018;392(10157):1553-1598. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(18)31612-X

⁸ Ferenchick EK, Hijazi Z, Bains A, et al. Integration of mental health services with HIV prevention, treatment and care. *Bull World Health Organ.* 2025;103(10):635-637. doi:10.2471/BLT.25.293646

⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Mental health and human rights. Accessed March 31, 2026. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/health/mental-health-and-human-rights>

Key Asks for the Political Declaration

Member States should commit to:

- Explicit recognition: Acknowledge mental health as a core component of HIV prevention, testing, treatment and long-term care.
- Service integration: Embed evidence-based mental health services within HIV programs and primary health care in facility and community-based settings.
- Sustainable financing: Allocate dedicated resources to support integrated HIV and mental health services.
- Workforce strengthening: Expand training and supervision, including community- and peer-led approaches, to deliver person-centred care.
- Accountability and monitoring: Include mental health indicators in HIV monitoring frameworks to track progress and outcomes.
- Human rights and equity: Address intersecting stigma and discrimination to ensure inclusive, rights-based, gender-responsive services.

Proposed Language for the Political Declaration

Building upon the [2021 Political Declaration](#), the mental health community proposes integrating mental health throughout the Political Declaration as well as introducing the following language:

Paragraph 1 (Recognition)

We recognize that mental health is integral to an effective, equitable and sustainable HIV response, and that mental health conditions, including depression and anxiety, as well as substance use, both contribute to and result from HIV vulnerability, with impacts across HIV prevention, testing, treatment, care and support. We further recognize that integrating evidence-based, rights-based and gender-responsive mental health services into HIV policies, programmes and service delivery, including within primary health care, is essential to ensuring access to comprehensive, person-centred care for people living with HIV and key and priority populations.

Paragraph 2 (Commitment)

We commit to strengthening national and community systems to deliver integrated HIV and mental health services, including by investing in the workforce through capacity building, task-sharing and community-led approaches, ensuring sustainable and equitable financing, and incorporating mental health indicators and measurable targets into HIV monitoring and accountability frameworks, in line with the Global AIDS Strategy 2026–2031. We will address intersecting forms of stigma and discrimination and will support data, research and innovation to scale up effective, evidence-based interventions that advance HIV prevention, treatment adherence and quality of life.

Call to Action

The Political Declaration must move beyond recognition to measurable commitments on mental health integration. By embedding mental health within the HIV response, Member States can accelerate progress, reduce inequalities and build sustainable systems that reflect the full needs of people living with, at risk of and affected by HIV.