

International health experts call for a special UN session on mental health

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A group of international health experts has called for a special session of the United Nations (referred to as UNGASS - United Nations General Assembly Special Session) to focus global attention on mental, neurological, and substance use disorders as a core development issue requiring commitments to improve access to care, promote human rights, and strengthen the evidence on effective prevention and treatment.

Writing in this week's [PLoS Medicine](#), the [health experts](#), led by Vikram Patel from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, UK and Judith Bass from Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, USA say: "The time has come for recognition at the highest levels of global development, namely the UN General Assembly, of the urgent need for a global strategy to address the global burden of MNS [disorders](#)."

Mental, neurological, and [substance use](#) disorders (MNS disorders – a relatively new acronym coined by the World Health Organization to refer to the complete range of disorders of the brain and the mind) are leading contributors to the global burden of disease and profoundly impact the social and economic well-being of individuals and communities. Yet the majority of people affected by MNS disorders globally do not have access to evidence-based interventions and many experience discrimination and abuses of their human rights.

The authors outline three broad areas of action needing urgent investment: to enhance access to evidence-based packages of care for the

treatment of MNS disorders; to realize the human rights commitment enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to ensure that people with MNS disorders live a life with dignity; and to expand knowledge about MNS disorders.

The authors say: "Securing the commitment of a majority of governments for a UNGASS will require a concerted effort from the diverse group of stakeholders concerned with MNS disorders" but argue: "the fact that MNS disorders affect people in all countries should offer considerable incentive for investments by both public and private sectors in this initiative."

The authors also encourage support for the development of a "People's Charter for Mental Health" that intends to identified priority needs into practical actionable steps for country implementation. The authors explain: "This charter will be developed in consultation with the organizations from 96 countries who have signed up to the "Great Push" initiative so far, representing over one million people including consumers, family members, advocates, researchers, professional organizations, and policy makers."

The authors conclude: "Together, this grand coalition of local, national, and global actors will converge their energies towards the implementation of a UNGASS to achieve the ultimate goal of reducing the global burden of MNS disorders."

More information: Bass JK, Bornemann TH, Burkey M, Chehil S, Chen L, et al. (2012) A United Nations General Assembly Special Session for Mental, Neurological, and Substance Use Disorders: The Time Has Come. PLoS Med 9(1): e1001159.

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