

# New global initiative will engage 30 cities by 2030 to close the mental health gap

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Credit: King's College London

King's College London is joining a major new initiative aiming to reduce the mental health gap by engaging global and community leaders across private, public and philanthropic organisations.

Launched this week at the Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) Annual Meeting in New York, "mental health now" or "mhNOW" is an unprecedented challenge to cities around the world to close the global mental health treatment gap by catalysing and networking collective actions among leaders in every sector.

The group of over 30 organisations includes King's College London, BasicNeeds, Grand Challenges Canada, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, International Medical Corps, Johnson & Johnson, National Institute of Mental Health, Orygen Center of Excellence in

Youth Mental Health, StrongMinds, Verily Alphabet, the World Bank, and the World Psychiatric Association, among others.

The mental health gap is one of the world's most devastating and under-resourced problems, affecting more than 450 million people worldwide and stretching far beyond the narrow boundaries of health. Mental illness will make up more than half of the economic burden of disease over the next two decades – more than cancer, diabetes, and chronic respiratory diseases combined – and the global cost of all mental disorders combined is estimated to reach \$6 trillion by 2030. Additionally, mental disorders are a particular challenge for youth – suicide is a top-three cause of death among youth worldwide, and 90 per cent of children who die by suicide have a mental illness.

Because the effects of mental illness touch livelihoods, productivity, and even whole economies, mhNOW is taking a cross-sector and city-driven approach to close the mental health gap. Cities – with their inherent networks, density, creativity and entrepreneurial capacity – bear the highest burden of mental health but also have the highest potential to achieve meaningful mental health impact.

mhNOW will engage 30 cities by 2030, mobilising and channeling support to exceptional city projects that address mental health by providing resources, recognition, and technical assistance for outstanding initiatives in three target areas: (1) scaling local evidence-based innovative programs; (2) mobilising youth leadership; and (3) improving the evidence base for the return on investment in mental health using city-level and global data indicators.

Professor Graham Thornicroft from the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience (IoPPN) is leading the King's College London group which is evaluation partner for the mhNOW consortium. He said: "mhNOW is a bold new partnership going well beyond previous

initiatives in this field. We aim to achieve transformational change by bringing together groups which have not previously been active in the mental health field, working together to increase access to treatment for people with mental illness in many of the world's greatest cities, by mobilising young people as agents of change. King's will play a vital role by assessing the impact of this ambitious global programme."

"Mental illness is humanity's largest burden – one in four of us will experience mental illness sometime in our lives, and in developing countries, over 90% of people with mental illness receive no treatment," said Chris Underhill, co-lead of mhNOW and founder of BasicNeeds. "The good news is that proven strategies for cost-effective and high-quality mental health treatment exist – we just need to activate them. This new initiative will empower cities to spark that action on mental health to close the gap."

**More information:** mhNOW: [www.mhnow.net/](http://www.mhnow.net/)

Global Development Incubator: [www.globaldevincubator.org/](http://www.globaldevincubator.org/)

Provided by King's College London

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