



# COMMONWEALTH NURSES AND MIDWIVES FEDERATION

e-News Vol.13 Issue 10 October 2020

## SEYCHELLES PASSES NEW MENTAL HEALTH LEGISLATION



The CNMF is very pleased to announce new mental health legislation has been enacted in the Seychelles. The new legislation is the culmination of a project initiated by the CNMF with funding support from the Commonwealth Foundation.

The CNMF project was motivated by research commissioned by the Commonwealth Health Professions Alliance for the 2013 Commonwealth Health Ministers' meeting and conducted by the Indian Law Society Centre for Mental Health Law and Policy on the state of mental health legislation across the Commonwealth. The research report concluded that mental health legislation in most Commonwealth countries is not compliant with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD); is based on an out-dated understanding of mental disorders; ignores advances in the care and treatment of mental disorders; and denies the human rights of persons with mental disorders and their capacity to manage their own lives.

As part of the CNMF project, the Seychelles Minister for Health established a National Mental Health Advisory Committee (NMHAC) to oversee the project in-country. The NMHAC was chaired by the Seychelles Chief Medical Officer, Dr Susan Fock-Tave.



Seychelles Mental Health Advisory Committee

Mental health legislative reform has been a priority focus for the CNMF over the past few years. Reform of legislation is essential for reform of mental health policy and practice.

The CNMF has also supported mental health legislative reform in Botswana where a draft Mental Health Bill is with the Minister for Health. It is anticipated the Bill will become law early 2021.

An MOU to write new mental health legislation was also signed with the Ministry of Health in the Bahamas in June 2019 and a National Mental Health Advisory Committee (NMHAC) established to undertake the work. Hurricane Dorian which devastated large parts of the Bahamas in October 2019 delayed the work with COVID-19 disrupting work on the new legislation even further. Despite these challenges, the Bahamas NMHAC meets regularly and a draft Mental Health Bill for the Bahamas is anticipated by March 2021. This work is being supported financially by the Commonwealth Secretariat.

There is increasing recognition by countries of the important role of mental health and wellbeing. The World Health Organisation (WHO) report that depression is one of the leading causes of disability. Globally, suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15-29 year olds. Despite progress in some countries, people with mental ill health often experience severe human rights violations, discrimination and stigma. Many mental health conditions can be effectively treated at relatively low cost, yet the gap between people needing care and those with access to care remains substantial.

Mental ill health is the third leading cause of disease burden in the world, predicted to be the leading disease burden by 2030. This prediction was made prior to the global COVID-19 pandemic which is having a devastating economic and social effect globally. Mental health care and services have never been more important.

The WHO report that countries spend on average only 2% of their health budgets on mental health. Despite some increases in recent years, international development assistance for mental health has never exceeded 1% of all development assistance for health. This is despite the fact that for every US\$ 1 invested in scaled-up treatment for common mental disorders such as depression and anxiety, there is a return of US\$ 5 in improved health and productivity.



# COMMONWEALTH NURSES AND MIDWIVES FEDERATION

e-News Vol.13 Issue 10 October 2020

## WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY 10 October

*"Move for mental health: let's invest"*



On World Mental Health Day 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) is calling for increased government investment globally in mental health. Past experience of emergencies, the WHO say, demonstrates that the need for mental health and psychosocial support will substantially increase as a result of the impact of COVID-19. Investment in mental health programs at the national and international levels, which have already suffered from years of chronic underfunding, is now more important than it has ever been.

World Mental Health Day, the WHO say, comes at a time when daily lives have changed considerably as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The past year has brought many challenges: for health-care workers, providing care in difficult circumstances, going to work fearful of bringing COVID-19 home with them; for students, adapting to taking classes from home, with little contact with teachers and friends, and anxious about their futures; for workers whose livelihoods are threatened; for the vast number of people caught in poverty or in fragile humanitarian settings with extremely limited protection from COVID-19; and for people with mental health conditions, many experiencing even greater social isolation than before. And this is to say nothing of managing the grief of losing a loved one, sometimes without being able to say goodbye. The anxiety, fear, isolation, social distancing, restrictions, uncertainty and emotional distress experienced have become widespread as the world struggles to bring the virus under control and to find solutions.

World Mental Health Day is a program of the World Federation for Mental Health and was observed for the first time on 10 October 1992. Its purpose is to raise awareness of mental health and the need for equity in the provision of mental health care.

## AFRICA DECLARED FREE FROM WILD POLIO

Africa has been declared free from wild polio by the independent body, the African Regional Certification Commission.

Polio usually affects children under five, sometimes leading to irreversible paralysis. Death can occur when breathing muscles are affected.

Two out of three strains of wild polio virus have been eradicated worldwide. Africa has now been declared free of the last remaining strain of wild poliovirus. Poliomyelitis is now only found in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In 1996, poliovirus paralysed more than 75,000 children across Africa. Since 1996, billions of oral polio vaccines have been provided, averting an estimated 1.8 million cases of wild poliovirus. The vaccination campaign was backed by a coalition of groups including Rotary International which has spearheaded the polio vaccination drive from the 1980s.

More than 95% of Africa's population have now been immunised. This was one of the conditions that the Africa Regional Certification Commission set before declaring the continent free from wild polio.

Nigeria is the last African country to be declared free from wild polio, having accounted for more than half of all global cases less than a decade ago. The vaccination campaign in Nigeria involved a huge effort to reach remote and dangerous places under threat from militant violence and some health workers were killed in the process. The involvement of people who had survived polio was crucial in overcoming public distrust of vaccination.

---

**Stay up to date with all the very  
latest news from the CNMF**

