



# COMMONWEALTH NURSES AND MIDWIVES FEDERATION

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## WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY ADDRESSES MENTAL HEALTH

**The 74<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly, meeting in May 2021, recommended the reinforcement of measures to protect mental health during public health emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.**

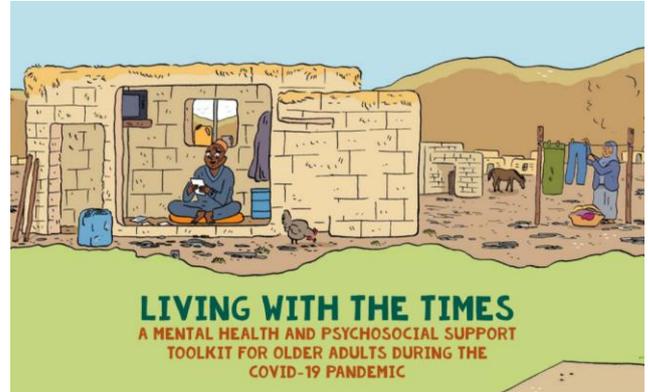
The Assembly noted that since the beginning of the pandemic, unemployment and financial instability, disruption to education, social isolation, fear of life-threatening disease, intimate partner and family violence, and sudden loss of loved ones, have become increasingly common. All of these are risk factors for mental health conditions and behavioural problems such as depression and substance use disorders.

Throughout 2020, the WHO developed a wide range of resources in many languages in collaboration with partners, including: a stress management guide for the general public; a guide for COVID-19 responders on basic psychosocial skills; and a toolkit to help older adults maintain mental well-being. In addition, the WHO has collaborated on the first-ever programme for rapid deployment of experts in mental health and psychosocial support during public health and humanitarian emergencies with more than 20 deployments since its launch in January 2020.

During the World Health Assembly, delegates endorsed that the Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020, be extended to 2030 and include updated implementation options and indicators. For the first time, the plan includes an indicator on preparedness for providing mental health and psychosocial support during emergencies.

The Assembly urged Member States to develop and strengthen comprehensive mental health services and psychosocial support as part of universal health coverage, with a particular focus on improving understanding and acceptance of mental health conditions, especially for vulnerable populations.

<https://www.who.int/news/item/31-05-2021-world-health-assembly-recommends-reinforcement-of-measures-to-protect-mental-health-during-public-health-emergencies>.



### Addressing the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health and wellbeing of older people

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on older women and men, who are at a higher risk of developing more severe symptoms of the disease, and of dying as a result. This is partly due to age-related changes to the immune system, which make it harder to fight off diseases and infection. Older adults are also more likely to have underlying health conditions, such as lung, kidney, cardiovascular or cerebrovascular disease or cancer, and to take multiple concurrent medications that make it harder to cope with, and recover from, illness.

The WHO has developed a mental health and psychosocial support toolkit for older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of the toolkit is to share ideas with older adults on how to protect their health and well-being, as well as provide support to those around them. The toolkit contains five large poster illustrations to print out or show on a screen, addressing the following questions:

1. How can I stay healthy?
2. What can I do to improve my mood?
3. How can I feel connected to my family and community?
4. Where can I get help if I need it?
5. How can I cope with grief and loss?

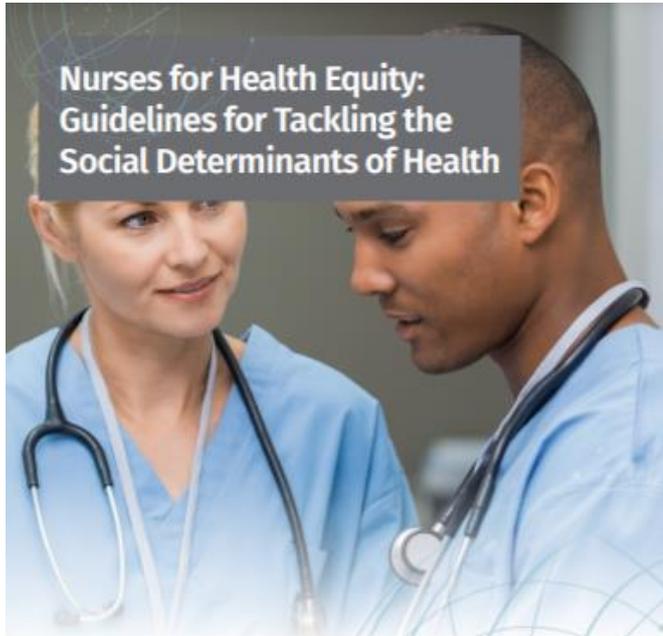
The toolkit also includes instructions for facilitators on how to conduct guided conversations with older adults using the posters. One hundred and ninety nine older adults aged between 60 and 90 years from 51 countries were involved in the development of the toolkit - <https://www.who.int/news/item/01-04-2021-living-with-the-times-new-toolkit-helps-older-adults-maintain-good-mental-health-and-wellbeing-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>.



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## WISH RELEASES 'NURSES FOR HEALTH EQUITY' REPORT



The World Innovation Summit for Health (WISH) have released their long anticipated report '*Nurses for Health Equity: Guidelines for tackling the social determinants of health*'. The report was authored by: William Rosa, Catherine Hannaway, Charlotte McArdle, Mary McManus, Sanaa Alharahsheh, and Michael Marmot.

The result of extensive global consultation, the report has detailed guidelines covering six domains:

1. Understanding the issue and what to do about it: education and training.
2. Building the evidence: monitoring and evaluation.
3. The clinical setting: working with individuals and communities.
4. Healthcare organisations as employers, managers and commissioners.
5. Working in partnership: within the health sector and beyond.
6. Nurses as advocates.

Each chapter contains practical actions that nursing associations and individual nurses can undertake to improve global health equity. The report includes comments from global nurse leaders and case studies which highlight actions nurses are already taking to improve health equity.

The full report can be downloaded from:  
<https://www.wish.org.qa/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Nurses-for-Health-Equity-.pdf>.

## NEW MENTAL HEALTH LEGISLATION FOR THE BAHAMAS

In October 2018, at a conference hosted by the Nurses Association of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas (NACB), the CNMF presented an overview of its project, working with two Commonwealth countries, the Seychelles and Botswana, to reform their mental health legislation. NACB leaders subsequently expressed an interest in the CNMF undertaking a similar project in The Bahamas.

Subsequent to the request from the NACB to the CNMF, and at a meeting with the then Health Minister, Dr Duane Sands, the Minister agreed to a formal Memorandum of Understanding with the CNMF to work with a National Mental Health Advisory Committee (NMHAC) to reform The Bahamas mental health legislation, enacted in 1969, and no longer fit for purpose. The Indian Law Society Centre for Mental Health Law and Policy provided technical support.

The first meeting of the NMHAC was held in June 2019 however subsequent meetings were first disrupted by Hurricane Dorian in October 2019 which devastated The Bahamas and then further disrupted by COVID-19 throughout 2020. Meeting recommenced online in September 2020 and by March 2021 a draft Bill was ready to undergo stakeholder consultation before being finalised for submission to the Ministry of Health and to Parliament.

This is a great example of what nurses can do to improve health equity, in this instance, for people with mental ill health in The Bahamas. The NACB were the driving force behind the project resulting in draft legislation which is rights based; which puts the person with mental illness at the centre of care and in control of their care and treatment; and which is compliant with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Bahamian context. Well done NACB.

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