

# Bulletin of the Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Rehabilitation Unit



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The Bulletin of the Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Rehabilitation Unit of the Pan American Health Organization / World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) is issued with the purpose of informing about important advances, news and publications in the areas of mental health, alcohol and substance abuse, rehabilitation and the protection of human rights within this context. In particular, the Bulletin focuses on those activities related to the technical assistance provided by PAHO/WHO to different actors in the Region. We hope it will become a useful tool for all those working in this important field of public health all over the Americas.

## Culture and Diversity in a Changing World World Mental Health Day Washington DC, 10 October 2007



One out of 35 people in the world is an immigrant, and in virtually every country, different languages, beliefs and cultures coexist. In this context, promoting mental health requires incorporating cultural sensitivity into mental health services and programs, experts said at a special event held to observe World Mental Health Day 2007, at PAHO Headquarters.

"Culture and diversity are central to the everyday perceptions, behaviors and interactions of individuals," said Dr. Carissa Etienne, Assistant Director of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). "It is no wonder, therefore, that culture and diversity influence the way that mental illness manifests itself, how individuals and communities perceive and cope with this illness, and how health care providers diagnose, treat, and care for persons with mental illness."

"One in four people suffers from a mental disorder at some time in his or her life. They are universal problems that affect people of all societies and countries, women and men of all ages, the rich and particularly the poor, those who live in cities and those who live in rural areas", Etienne remarked. "Since every individual has the right to his or her own values, culture and beliefs, it is the responsibility of health providers to develop intercultural competencies to be able to provide the appropriate care", said Etienne. She also noted that, in addition to the challenge of diversity, the countries of the Americas face a growing gap between the burden of mental illness and specialized services for the mentally ill, which she considered unacceptable.

Led by the World Federation for Mental Health and supported by PAHO and other institutions, this year's World Mental Health Day focuses on the growing importance of cultural competency and sensitivity in ensuring effective mental health programs and services around the world. According to the World Federation, social and cultural influences play a key role in individual mental health, the use of mental health services, and the provision of mental health care. "A female mental health professional born and trained in India may have moved to the United Kingdom and is seeing a male client born and raised in Ecuador-how do they communicate and how do each view the same mental illness?" the Federation asks in a special booklet prepared for World Mental Health Day.

(P.T.O.)

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"How do we overcome the barriers of language and cultural differences, views of mental illness, gender issues, and different training and teaching methods?" To confront this challenge, the World Federation, PAHO and other supporters say that mental health services should be developed and strengthened so that they can provide the best care possible to individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

Participants in the World Mental Health Day observance event, held at PAHO Headquarters, included Dr. Preston J. Garrison, Secretary-General of the World Federation for Mental Health, and Dr. Eliot Sorel, Professor of Global Health at George Washington University.

"In the PAHO Region, one of the top priorities in this area is technical cooperation with the countries to develop programs aimed at protecting the mental health of indigenous and minority populations, as well as of vulnerable groups," said Dr. Jorge Rodríguez, Chief of PAHO's Mental Health Unit. "Health services that are developed to serve psychosocial needs must be not only accessible but also culturally acceptable."

## UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon calls for scaling up resources for mental health services



10 October 2007 – "We have a pressing obligation to scale up care and services for mental disorders, especially among the disadvantaged, while stepping up efforts to protect the human rights of those affected," Mr. Ban Ki-moon said in his [message>>](#) for World Mental Health Day.



### GLOBAL ALCOHOL DATABASE

<http://www.who.int/globalatlas/default.asp>

Since 1997, the World Health Organization has been building the Global Alcohol Database, providing a standardized reference source of information for global epidemiological surveillance of alcohol use, alcohol related problems and alcohol policies in WHO Member States.

### Research capacity for mental health in low and middle-income countries: Results of a mapping project

This report provides an account of the current status of mental health research in 114 lower and middle income countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. The scale of the study makes it the first systematic attempt to confirm the pressing needs of improving research capacity in mental health.

[Results of a mapping project>>](#)



### Panama Spanish version of two brochures from WHO Program on Prevention of Suicidal Behaviors -SUPRE-



The Spanish version of two tools from WHO Program on "Prevention of Suicidal Behaviors" (SUPRE) have been published within the framework of the technical cooperation project activities between Panama and Cuba for the development of Mental Health Policies, Plans, Services and Legislation.

They are intended for primary health care workers and media professionals.

[-Preventing suicide: a resource for primary health care workers>>](#)

[-Preventing suicide: a resource for media professionals>>](#)

### Coming EVENTS

- WPA International Congress, "Working Together for Mental Health: Partnerships for Policy and Practice", Melbourne, Australia, 28 November- 2 December, 2007. <http://www.wpa2007melbourne.com>

- 5th National Congress, National Institute of Social Security & II Regional WPA Zone 3 Conference. Mexico City, Mexico, February 1-5, 2008.

- II International Conference on Medicine & Women's Mental Health: Assimilating a Different Approach. Medellin, Colombia, February 14-16, 2008. [www.ces.edu.co](http://www.ces.edu.co)

- Panamerican Conference on Infant Juvenile Mental Health. WPA & Cuban Society of Psychiatry. Havana, Cuba, March 24-28, 2008. [www.cpalco.com](http://www.cpalco.com)

- WPA Thematic Conference on Depression and Relevant Psychiatric Condition in Primary Care, Granada, Spain, June 19-21, 2008. [www.wpa2008granada.org](http://www.wpa2008granada.org)