



Transforming Mental Health in the USA

11/9/2021

Senator Ron Wyden
Senator Mike Crapo
Committee on Finance

Sir,

We write this submission on behalf of the GlobalMentalHealth@Harvard initiative, in response to your letter dated September 21st, 2021, addressed to members of the behavioral health care community.

Mental health problems affect us all. These diverse group of health conditions together contribute to one-third of years lost due to disability (YLD) in adults. Their onset most often occurs before the age of 24 years of age. Indeed, mental health problems are the leading cause of ill health and mortality in adolescents and young people, mainly due to suicide and substance use disorders. Mental health problems are strongly associated with social disadvantage, are inseparable from physical health, cut lives short, and lead to profound levels of suffering and disability for individuals, their families, and communities. They cause a large negative impact on household financial security, economic productivity and to the bottom-line of businesses. Despite the US spending more money per capita on mental health care and enjoying the highest per capita human resources for mental health care than any other country, all the metrics related to the burden of mental health problems, from the prevalence of disorders to suicide mortality, from the numbers of persons incarcerated to those living on the margins of society, are worsening. The pandemic is only fueling an already burning crisis.

Sir, in short, despite the vast sums of money spent and in spite of enjoying the highest number of mental health resources in the world, the US mental health care system is failing the people. We need a dramatic transformation in our approach to build back better a mental health care system which addresses long-standing challenges and can address the large, and growing, mental health needs of the population.

GlobalMentalHealth@Harvard

Now more than ever, the field of mental health requires clinicians, policy makers, government leaders, researchers, and community activists to work collaboratively to scale up strategies to reduce the burden of suffering due to mental health problems and the disparities in the realization of good mental health. Harvard has established itself as the leader in the field of global mental health, a discipline whose historic focus has been on addressing the mental health needs of populations which have very limited resources and reducing disparities in the access to quality mental health care; our initiative now seeks to bring these lessons into play in the US. Our faculty include the leaders of most of the global mental health initiatives over the past two decades, starting with the *World Mental Health Report* (1995)—a landmark publication that laid the foundations of the discipline. Subsequent contributions include leadership of the *World Mental Health Survey Initiative*, the NIMH sponsored *Grand Challenges in Global Mental Health*, the *Lancet Commission on Global Mental Health & Sustainable Development* and the *Time for United Action on Depression-A Lancet-World Psychiatric Commission*. The signatories of this submission include Vikram Patel (The Pershing Square Professor of Global Health at Harvard Medical School) and Shekhar Saxena (Professor of the Practice of Global Mental Health at the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health), who are recognized as the leading scientists and policy makers in the field globally. Patel is the most cited author in global mental health and Saxena led the WHO's Department of Mental Health and Substance Use for a decade. These two leaders join a galaxy of leaders of diverse disciplines, schools and faculties relevant to global mental health. The research programs they lead span more than 50 countries and comprise deep and longstanding partnerships with universities, research institutes, non-profit organizations, and policy makers. Together, this galaxy of scholarship and their collaborators form the GlobalMentalHealth@Harvard Initiative (GMH@Harvard).

Launched in April 2018, the GMH@Harvard Initiative capitalizes on the depth and diversity of this expertise to transform mental health and realize the aspirations of mental health as a universal public good and a fundamental human right. Its mission is guided by the *Lancet Commission on Global Mental Health and Sustainable Development* (led by Patel and Saxena) which recommended adopting a dimensional approach to addressing the entire spectrum of mental health problems, a substantial increase in provision of quality care for mental disorders using innovations such as task sharing and digital interventions, public policies to reduce exposure to known harms to mental health, emphasizing a rights-based approach to mental health care, having larger human and financial investments, and better monitoring and accountability. GMH@Harvard is the most ambitious and forward-looking mental health initiative in the world. The initiative has identified several priorities which address structural barriers which impede the attainment of global mental health goals: the lack of leadership, the lack of a community based workforce, the lack of accountability and the human rights violations of persons with mental health problems. In this submission, we elaborate four which are of particular relevance to the goals outlined in your letter, notably the building

of a workforce, increasing integration and coordination of care, ensuring parity and improving access to care for children and young people.



EMPOWER: Building the Community Mental Health Workforce

EMPOWER seeks to address the massive need for a community based mental health workforce by converging three strands of science: 1) Clinical science, which demonstrates the effectiveness of brief psychosocial interventions for the prevention and care of a range of mental illnesses; 2) Implementation science, which shows that frontline workers can effectively deliver these interventions with appropriate training and supervision; and 3) Digital science, which shows that digitally delivered learning curricula can effectively train frontline workers to achieve competency to deliver these interventions in routine care settings. EMPOWER comprises a suite of connected digital tools that offers a pathway to rapidly train large numbers of frontline and community-based workers with no prior mental health training to learn, master, and deliver quality-assured and evidence-based psychosocial interventions that have been shown to promote mental health, and prevent or help people recover from various mental illnesses. EMPOWER offers a seamless pathway for these frontline workers to progress from being a new learner to becoming an experienced and skilled provider. This progression includes milestones for the evaluation of competencies, achieving criteria for demonstrating skills in practice, and continuing quality assessments. These tools are further supported by data science to link the digital footprints of the frontline workers and their clinical care encounters, with patient facing data derived from patient apps and Electronic Health Records to enable ongoing impact evaluation and continuing quality improvement. Thanks to being a part of the winning team of the Lone Star Prize in June 2021, EMPOWER will start the delivery of a brief psychological treatment for depression by frontline workers (such as community health workers) in Texas, in partnership with the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, from 2022 onwards.



CHAMPIONS: Strengthening Mental Health Leadership

The implementation of the recommendations of the Lancet Commission depends on federal, state-level and local leadership. One of the barriers to building a responsive and efficient mental health system is the limited knowledge and skills in the leadership of the system to scale-up evidence based innovations to improve access to quality mental health care and reduce disparities. **Mental Health**

Champions: An Executive Leadership Program for Mental Health (ELP-MH)

responds to this need by providing training and building global, national and local peer networks of leaders to empower them to scale up evidence based innovative programs to address the mental health needs of their communities. CHAMPIONS is envisioned as a training and mentoring program where professionals from around the country and their global counterparts, and from diverse backgrounds, can receive knowledge and skills on scaling up mental health care through a combination of expert-led didactic training and peer-learning. This will lead to enhanced capacity to plan, implement and

monitor population level programs and initiatives, embracing both empirical evidence and real-world lessons. Participants will be practitioners, policy advisors, health administrators, service planners, business leaders and civil society organization functionaries with interest and responsibility for mental health. The didactic program has two distinct modules: one focuses on the evidence and tools to support the scaling up of innovative strategies; the second focuses on the leadership skills necessary to realize these aspirations. Participants who complete both these modules are then invited to join the third module: a peer learning collaborative to support and learn from one another as they embark on their journey of being Champions for mental health.



COUNTDOWN: Holding Mental Health Care Systems Accountable

Monitoring and accountability are essential strategies for evaluating, and enhancing, the impact of investments. There is currently no standard approach to monitoring and accountability for mental health care in the US, in particular no standard set of metrics or indices which can be used to compare, evaluate and track the performance of mental health care systems at the state, county or city levels. A diverse variety of process and outcome measures are used making comparisons and tracking difficult and timely aggregation and reporting of these is far from ideal. This leads to lost opportunities to learn from diverse strategies which may have differential impacts on population mental health, contributing to inefficiencies and wastage of resources. Countdown Mental Health is a global initiative to identify a range of indicators for mental health, derive composite indices which are valid measures of the performance of the mental health care system, and collect, aggregate and report the data in a timely manner to influence policy and practice. The scope of these indicators is comprehensive- including not only mental health care system but also determinants, need and demand for services within the framework of sustainable development goals. While the global Countdown compares indicators across countries (including USA), national Countdown will monitor efficiency of the system within the country e.g. across states and countries of the US. This will illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of the diverse systems within the country and will lead to identification of effective strategies which should be scaled up. Countdown is based on the premise that data and knowledge should be the basis for planning and effectiveness and efficiencies (including based on costs) should be used for future investments.



ENGAGE: Engaging with and Enhancing Empowerment of Persons with the Lived Experience

A major challenge faced by persons with mental health problems, in particular serious mental disorders such as the psychoses, and especially by persons from ethnic and racial minority groups, is the increased risk of experiencing violence and coercion and high rates of incarceration. GMH@Harvard considers this as the most significant crisis in mental health care in the USA. ENGAGE intends to address this

crisis by identifying and scaling up strategies to reduce the risk of incarceration and of coercion and involuntary hospitalization in mental health care. The voices of people with the lived experience of mental health problems are critical to address these challenges. We initiated this work-stream with a workshop in September 2019 where legal experts, mental health professionals, and prominent self-advocates elaborated on the practical considerations and research agenda of the goal of eliminating the involuntary treatment of persons with mental disorders and their incarceration. This workshop has led to the publication in October 2021 of a landmark volume documenting effective strategies, from improving access to community based early intervention which can reduce the risk of acute crises to peer-enabled supported decision making. ENGAGE now seeks to deploy these strategies to generate guidelines on supported decision making and enabling the engagement of people with the lived experience to design, deliver and evaluate the quality of mental health care.

Our commitment to America

We are now poised to achieve our ambitions, drawing upon the unparalleled history of scholarship, service and expertise, towards transforming mental health care in the US. Our priority work-streams are designed to address the historic structural barriers and achieve the goal of health equity for people with mental health problems. Without addressing all of these barriers collectively, the US is unlikely to see much impact, no matter how much political will or financial investment is committed.

GMH@Harvard enthusiastically welcomes the opportunity to partner with and to contribute to your vision to transform mental health care in the US.



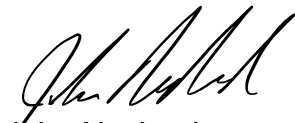
Vikram Patel

The Pershing Square Professor of Global Health, Department of Global Health and Social Medicine, Harvard Medical School (Vikram_patel@hms.harvard.edu)



Shekhar Saxena

Professor of the Practice of Global Mental Health, Harvard T H Chan School of Public Health (ssaxena@hsph.harvard.edu)



John Naslund

Instructor of Global Health and Social Medicine, Harvard Medical School (John_naslund@hms.harvard.edu)