



Building thriving communities

Promoting brain and mental health

Hybrid Global Conference | Nov 3 - 5, 2025
Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY



Brain & Mind Institute
from neuron to neighbourhood

Thematic overview

Conference vision

Countries in the Global South, including Pakistan, face growing mental health challenges driven by demographic transitions, climate change, migration, and socio-economic instability. Yet, amidst these pressures lies immense potential for innovation, resilience, and culturally grounded solutions. This conference brings together researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and communities to share ideas and build inclusive systems that protect and promote mental and brain health across the lifespan.

Join the Movement: From November 3rd to 5th, 2025, the Brain and Mind (BMI) International Conference 2025 brings together experts, researchers, policymakers, and community leaders to address the pressing issues in brain health and mental health. This year's conference focuses on reimagining how to build thriving communities, through promotion of brain health and mental health in the Global South.

Objectives

- Address the challenges and opportunities in building thriving communities in the Global South
- Showcase cutting-edge research, interventions, and programs in mental and brain health Foster collaboration among community stakeholders, formal and informal health care service providers, , researchers, and policymakers Discuss policy initiatives to enhance access to mental and brain health services in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs)

01. Reimagining brain and mental health care: Context sensitive innovation

In Pakistan and other low-resource settings, the mental and brain health treatment gap remains wide due to stigma, shortage of professionals, and geographic inaccessibility. But the rise of context-aware, culturally embedded innovations ranging from AI-driven tools to low-cost digital platforms and community co-designed interventions is creating new possibilities. This theme explores scalable, people-centered approaches that respond to local realities while leveraging global best practices.

02. Untangling ties between noncommunicable diseases (NCD) and brain health: Addressing the critical divide for holistic well-being

Mental health and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like diabetes, cardiovascular conditions, and cancer are deeply intertwined. In LMICs, where both are on the rise, siloed approaches are failing communities. This theme calls for integrated care models that treat mental and physical health as interconnected, emphasizing prevention, early detection, and coordinated community-level responses. It highlights innovations in primary care, behavior change, and community outreach that bridge this critical divide.

03. Mental health journeys of young migrants' performance

As migration; internal and international becomes a defining experience for many young people, questions of identity, belonging, and psychosocial well-being emerge. Young people navigating multiple cultures often face intergenerational tensions, discrimination, and loneliness, with limited access to mental health support. This theme delves into the lived experiences of migrant youth, offering insights into resilience, vulnerability, and the importance of culturally competent care and support networks that foster inclusion. This session will include a Theatrical Performance using real stories, spoken word, and music, to capture the emotional complexities of displacement and identity conflict, fostering empathy and inclusive mental health responses.

04. The gut-brain connection: Resilience from the inside out

Emerging research on how the gut-brain axis reveals strong links between gut microbiota dysbiosis and a range of neurodegenerative and neuropsychiatric conditions including depression, anxiety, Parkinson's disease, and Alzheimer's. This theme explores how improving gut health through traditional diets, probiotics, and community-based nutrition initiatives can offer low-cost, culturally relevant strategies to enhance mental resilience and cognitive well-being.

05. Brain aging and dementia: Strategies for cognitive longevity

With a growing older population and limited geriatric mental and brain health services, the Global South is facing a silent crisis in aging-related cognitive decline. Dementia, Alzheimer's, and other neurodegenerative conditions are rising, yet remain poorly understood and stigmatized. This theme explores global and local strategies to promote brain health across the lifespan highlighting early detection, caregiver support, and innovative community-based models for cognitive longevity and aging with dignity.

06. Climate, crisis, and coping: Strengthening mental health in uncertain times

From floods and droughts to political instability and displacement, LMICs are experiencing increasing levels of distress. Climate change and environmental degradation are emerging as key social determinants of mental and brain ill-health. This theme examines how trauma, anxiety, and eco-distress manifest in vulnerable populations and how communities can build psychological resilience in the face of uncertainty. It invites discussion on trauma-informed care, climate-adaptive health systems, and psychosocial support during disasters.

07. Digital mental health: Transforming care, connecting communities

Digital tools have the potential to democratize mental and brain health care in LMICs, especially in underserved regions. From telepsychiatry to mobile self-help platforms and WhatsApp-based counseling services, digital innovation is expanding access and redefining mental health delivery. This theme explores the promise and pitfalls of digital mental health, focusing on equity, data privacy, cultural acceptability, and the role of technology in strengthening human connection not replacing it.

08. Suicide prevention: Prioritizing 'upstream approaches' to reducing risk

Suicide remains a taboo subject in LMICs, with legal and social barriers hindering help-seeking. However, integrated grassroots models led by communities, educators, and peer supporters are demonstrating strong potential to identify at-risk individuals and enable early intervention. This theme emphasizes the need for decriminalization, increased awareness, and sustainable community-based interventions that make prevention a collective responsibility, focusing on dignity, hope, and evidence-based responses to suicidal distress.

Join us in building thriving communities

This conference is not just an event it is a movement to build collective capacity, inspire innovation, and promote mental and brain health across the Global South. We invite donors, technical partners, policymakers and thought leaders to support these efforts through collaboration, investment, and participation. Your contribution can help strengthen systems, uplift voices, and spark a new era of inclusive, community-led mental healthcare. Together let us reimagine how to nurture our brains to yield resilient communities and healthier nations.