



STRENGTHENING MENTAL HEALTH FOR ALL: DRIVING PAKISTAN'S PROGRESS TOWARD SDG 3 AND BEYOND

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

Mental health is a critical yet under-prioritized public health issue in Pakistan, with nearly 1 in 5 individuals affected and up to 90% receiving no treatment. Despite mental health's central role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), systemic challenges, including limited resources, stigma, and weak integration into healthcare systems, continue to hinder progress.

Urgent action is required to integrate mental health into primary healthcare, strengthen workforce capacity, prioritize prevention, and ensure equitable access to services—particularly for vulnerable populations.



WHY MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS



Essential to SDG 3
GOOD HEALTH & WELL-BEING

Directly Linked to:



POVERTY
(SDG 1)



NUTRITION
(SDG 2)



ECONOMIC PRODUCTIVITY
(SDG 8)



RESILIENT COMMUNITIES
(SDG 11)



CLIMATE RESILIENCE
(SDG 13)

Mental health is not a standalone issue—it underpins sustainable development, equity, and social inclusion.

SITUATION AT A GLANCE (PAKISTAN 🇵🇰)

Burden of Disease



1 in 5 People Experience
Mental Health Conditions



10 to 16% Adults Suffer From
Depression & Anxiety



10 to 20% Children & Adolescents
Affected



\$2.97 Economic Cost
of mental
illness
billion

Treatment Gap



75-90%
Untreated

System Capacity



<500 Psychiatrists
Nationwide



01 Psychiatrists
Per 500,000 People



4 Major Psychiatric
Hospitals



2.1 Psychiatric Beds
Per 100,000 People

KEY CHALLENGES

1 Limited Resources & Infrastructure

Chronic underfunding, workforce shortages, and weak infrastructure limit service delivery, especially in rural areas.

2 Barriers to Access

Mental health illiteracy, financial constraints, and geographic disparities restrict timely care—disproportionately affecting women and low-income groups.

3 Stigma & Discrimination

Deep-rooted stigma discourages help-seeking and delays treatment, particularly among women and youth.

4 Weak Data Systems

Lack of reliable data and underreporting limit effective planning and resource allocation.

5 Poor Policy Integration

Mental health remains insufficiently integrated into national and provincial health systems, with fragmented implementation.

6 Gender Inequities

Women and marginalized groups face higher risks but receive limited targeted support.

7 Limited Focus on Prevention

Mental health systems are largely reactive, with insufficient investment in prevention and resilience-building.

WAY FORWARD | PRIORITY ACTIONS

1 Integrate Mental Health Into Primary Healthcare

Scale up the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) model nationwide, ensuring clear referral pathways from community to specialist care. Operationalize the National Mental Health Policy (2025).



2 Expand Workforce Capacity

Train primary healthcare providers, community health workers, educators, lady health workers, and community networks to bridge service gaps, promote early identification, improve mental health literacy, and encourage timely care-seeking.

3 Strengthen Awareness and Reduce Stigma

Implement sustained campaigns using social media, mass media, and community platforms to normalize help-seeking.



4 Build Institutional Capacity

Strengthen systems for supervision, training, and delivery of evidence-based mental health services across all regions.

5 Engage Youth in Decision-Making

Involve young people in awareness efforts and service design to improve relevance and uptake.



6 Prioritize Prevention & Early Intervention

Address risk factors (poverty, trauma, violence) while strengthening resilience and protective environments.

7 Deploy Counsellors in Schools and Colleges

Ensure early identification and support through trained counsellors in educational institutions.



CONCLUSION

Mental health is central to achieving SDG 3 and Pakistan's broader development goals. Addressing the current crisis requires a coordinated, multisectoral approach focused on integration, prevention, equity, and system strengthening.

Investing in mental health will lead to healthier individuals, stronger communities, and a more resilient and productive society.