

CHMM 2013 statement

Statement by Hon Rev. Dr John G N Seakgosing, Minister of Health, Botswana

Geneva, Switzerland

Ahead of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in November 2013, Commonwealth Ministers of Health held their annual meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, on the eve of the 66th World Health Assembly. The theme of the meeting was 'Mental Health: Towards Economic and Social Inclusion'.

1. Ministers welcomed the attention being given to mental health within the Commonwealth, building on work undertaken in recent years on non-communicable diseases (NCDs).
2. Ministers discussed the economic and social impact of mental disorders on individuals, their families, communities and countries, noting the complex interrelationship of multiple factors.
3. Ministers agreed that addressing stigma and discrimination associated with mental disorders is critical to the overall improvement of health outcomes.
4. Ministers noted with concern that, despite the availability of effective interventions to provide health and social care for people with mental disorders, more than three-quarters of people facing mental health challenges in low and middle-income countries, and up to half of those in some high-income countries, receive inadequate mental health treatment.
5. Ministers noted that despite socio-economic challenges, some low-income and middle-income Commonwealth countries had developed effective strategies for addressing mental health issues, particularly the socio-economic aspects of mental health. Indeed, mental health programs in some Commonwealth countries are setting international benchmarks. However, other countries still suffer from entrenched cultural modes which prevent effective treatment of mental health. Ministers welcomed the sharing of practical examples and lessons learnt from them as a way of expanding and improving holistic community-based care interventions, the need to identify risk factors particularly in the perinatal stages through childhood and adolescence as well as increase public awareness and advocacy through engagement at the work place.
6. Ministers recognized the importance of data, policy, legislation, integrated multi-sectoral approaches, capacity building and the allocation of appropriate resources for mental health to reflect the need to move from institutionalized care to community and primary health care.
7. Ministers noted the need to continue advocacy for the inclusion of health in all government policies and in the post-2015 development agenda. Ministers also agreed that health has a bearing on the enjoyment of the core values of the Commonwealth such as equity and access to education, human rights, democracy and gender equality. Ministers therefore reiterated the need to include health in the wider socio-economic development agenda.
8. Ministers emphasised the importance of the Commonwealth contributing actively to the post-2015 development agenda and the need to champion the goal of maximising health at all stages of life including through universal health coverage and access. Furthermore Ministers noted the importance of continuing to progress MDGs 4, 5 and 6 as well as including NCDs.
9. Ministers acknowledged the work of the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Health (CACH), which will make an important contribution to the Commonwealth Secretariat's work plan for health. Ministers agreed to defer a decision on the theme for the next CHMM until after final approval of the Commonwealth Secretariat's new Strategic Plan.
10. Ministers welcomed the work of The Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust in reducing avoidable blindness. They requested that the Trust further promotes the WHO action plan across the Commonwealth in order to bring life changing benefits to individuals and also significant economic and social benefits across the Commonwealth.
11. Ministers noted the initiative for 'Common Health', an online hub for Commonwealth health professionals and asked for an update at the next CHMM.
12. Ministers thanked the Secretary-General for his leadership, noting the continuing process of reform and renewal in order to deepen the impact and raise the profile of the Commonwealth.
13. Ministers requested that this statement be communicated to Commonwealth Heads of Government at their next meeting in November 2013 in Colombo