

Statement to the 53rd session of the Directing Council of PAHO on:

Agenda item: 4.6 Plan of Action on Mental Health

To be read by: Abby Speller

Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to address the Directing Council on behalf of Medicus Mundi International and the People's Health Movement.

We welcome many aspects of the Plan of Action on Mental Health. PHM feels that this Plan is an important move toward better mental health for the region and wishes to raise several points of concern.

In particular, the document uses a very limited definition of mental health. There is little attention to other conceptualizations of mental health and approaches to care such as those of indigenous populations, which incorporate concepts such as equilibrium, harmony, and good living.

While the Plan does give attention to the social determinants of health and social and cultural issues that contribute to mental ill health, it continues to promote interventions based on a medical treatment model. It is the belief of PHM that comprehensive care rooted in a social determinants approach is critical for ensuring adequate prevention.

Finally, PHM commends the Directing Council for highlighting important approaches that may close the mental health treatment gap, including the integration of mental health at the primary level. However, the approach outlined, which relies on personnel to know and respect cultural and religious knowledge and beliefs, can go much further. The models of care in indigenous practices as well as other approaches that take into account cultural and community approaches should be incorporated into any approach to mental health.

PHM urges PAHO to:

1. Push for integration of mental health care at the primary level
2. Consult indigenous and local communities in developing plans and approaches to address mental health
3. Give appropriate attention to social, political, and economic policies that create inequality contributing to mental ill health
4. Work to ensure that there is more continuity between this Plan and the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals

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