



The Big Question: Can we really afford not to invest in mental health care? By [Hannah Brown](#) 04/10/2024

## Two thirds of people around the world struggle to access mental health support but can we economically afford to continue down this path?

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) one in eight people in the world are living with a mental disorder.

By comparison, that's much more people than are diagnosed with breast cancer. One in 12 women will be diagnosed in their lifetime.

And, while not all mental health conditions are life-threatening, some of the most prevalent serious mental conditions such as schizophrenia (one in 300 people are affected) are among the leading causes globally of [disability](#).

On average, countries dedicate less than 2% of their [healthcare budgets](#) to mental health, without considering the financial impact underfunding care has on business and the economy.

In this episode of The Big Question, Nedim Pipic, Senior Vice President and Global Head of Mental Health at Boehringer Ingelheim sat down with Hannah Brown to discuss why we have to invest in mental health.

## How is mental health impacting the economy?

Most of us agree that we all deserve a [happy and healthy life](#), but in a world driven by profits, is there a business case for better investment in mental health?

"Investments in mental health are not just in that area, if we do that well, it's an investment in society, it's an investment in our economy, and it's also an investment for all those affected," Nedim told The Big Question.

In fact, the stats to back it up are even more shocking than you might realise.

Currently, across the world we are losing around \$2.5tn (€2.3tn) per year due to poor mental health and productivity decline.

Even something that seems as simple as a staff member taking sick leave can eventually cascade into a decline in business revenue linked to reputation loss and customer churn.

And if we don't do something about it soon, we're on track for the global losses to grow to \$6tn (€5.4tn) by 2030 - a figure that equates to more than the GDP of Germany (the third largest economy in the world) or around one third of China's GDP.



## What investment is needed in mental health?

Rates of education and **employment** are shown to drop at the time of diagnosis of a serious mental health condition - in the case of schizophrenia it drops to around 12%. (The average employment rate in the EU in 2023 was 75.3%).

And, in a world where financial security and employment are closely interlinked and, according to a 2023 Eurobarometer survey, 53% respondents said financial security is a key part of good mental health - keeping people mentally healthy and employed seems to be good for people and for the economy.

### So what needs to be done to get us there?

According to Nedim, we need to first of all reduce stigma to help encourage more people to seek help. Education plays a huge role in this.

"It's just so hard to say: 'This is a burden on me. Can you please help me?'" he explained.

Currently for those who do seek it, in Europe only 70% are actually able to access mental health care and so investment is required just to have sufficient staffing and practitioners to handle the problem and create a better **patient journey**.

While there are healthcare targets in the **UN's Sustainable Development Goals** - SDG 3 aims to prevent needless suffering from preventable diseases and premature death - Nedim stressed that countries must take action on a national level.

The estimated global funding gap for mental health right now is \$200bn (€181.3 bn). While that's a lot of money, it's nowhere near the amount we'll lose if we don't invest in mental health.

While many of us might agree we shouldn't put a price on good mental health, the maths suggest the price to pay isn't that high, when the cost of not doing so is enormous on so many levels.

**Exercise A: Match the words from the article to their correct definitions. Write the letter of the correct definition next to each word.**

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. <b>Struggle</b>      | a) A mark of shame or disapproval associated with something.                  |
| 2. <b>Access</b>        | b) The ability to use or get something  |
| 3. <b>Prevalent</b>     | c) Finding it difficult to do something.                                      |
| 4. <b>Disability</b>    | d) A physical or mental condition that limits a person's activities           |
| 5. <b>Underfunding</b>  | e) Happening too soon or earlier than expected.                               |
| 6. <b>Investment</b>    | f) Common or widespread.  |
| 7. <b>Schizophrenia</b> | g) The lack of enough money provided for something.                           |
| 8. <b>Reputation</b>    | h) The beliefs or opinions people have about someone or something.            |
| 9. <b>Stigma</b>        | i) A mental disorder affecting thinking, emotions, and behavior.              |
| 10. <b>Premature</b>    | j) An action of putting money or effort into something to get benefits later. |

**Exercise B: Complete the sentences with the correct word from the list below.**

<b>Cascade</b>	<b>prevalence</b>	<b>customer churn</b>
<b>Schizophrenia</b>	<b>underfunding</b>	<b>struggle</b>
<b>Reputation</b>	<b>stigma</b>	<b>investment</b>

1. It's important to reduce the \_\_\_\_\_ around mental health so people feel comfortable seeking help.
2. Countries around the world often suffer from \_\_\_\_\_ in mental health services, leading to a lack of care for many people.
3. Some of the most \_\_\_\_\_ mental health issues include anxiety and depression, affecting millions of people.
4. Many people \_\_\_\_\_ to find proper support for their mental health needs.
5. Businesses need to analyze the reasons behind \_\_\_\_\_ to improve customer retention.
6. A poor decision by management can \_\_\_\_\_ into declining employee morale and productivity.

**Exercise C: Read the following statements and answer True or False. If the answer is False, provide the correct information to support it.**

1. **Mental health conditions, such as schizophrenia, are primarily a concern for their life-threatening effects, rather than their impact on global disability rates.**

**True**

**False**

2. **Currently, most countries allocate less than 2% of their healthcare budgets to mental health, without taking into account the broader financial impact on businesses and the economy.**  
**True**      **False**
3. **Customer churn refers to the financial loss that occurs when mental health conditions reduce employee productivity.**  
**True**      **False**
4. **The global economy is losing \$2.5 trillion per year due to the impacts of poor mental health and decreased productivity, and this is projected to more than double by 2030.**  
**True**      **False**
5. **The article highlights that addressing mental health issues is primarily an ethical responsibility and has minimal financial implications for businesses.**  
**True**      **False**
6. **Despite the significant economic losses due to mental health issues, the global funding gap for mental health care is relatively small, estimated at around \$50 billion.**  
**True**      **False**
7. **The projected economic loss by 2030 due to poor mental health is expected to surpass the GDP of Germany, the world's third-largest economy.**  
**True**      **False**
8. **Reducing stigma around mental health issues is suggested as a key step in improving access to mental health care services, according to the article.**  
**True**      **False**