



**World Health
Organization**

Western Pacific
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Investing in mental health benefits people and the economy

DOH, WHO, UNDP, and UN NCD Task Force share important findings from Investment Case Report on Mental Health in the Philippines

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Mental health conditions cost the Philippine economy a staggering PHP 68.9 billion (US\$ 1.37 billion) each year, equivalent to 0.4% of its GDP, according to a mental health investment case for the Philippines launched by the Department of Health (DOH) and the United Nations in Manila last 13 October 2021 during the 4th Public Health Convention on Mental Health.

Based on the findings of the Investment Case Report on Mental Health in the Philippines, around 96% of this cost comes from loss in productivity, with the remaining 4% coming from healthcare costs.

The good news is that investing in a small set of evidence-based, cost-effective actions could result in 700,000 healthy life years gained and over 5,000 lives being saved in the Philippines, with economic benefits of PHP 217 billion (US\$ 4.3 billion) over the next 10 years.

Presented by the Department of Health (DOH) and the World Health Organization (WHO) Philippines, in collaboration with the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on NCD (UNIATF) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Investment Case Report outlines a number of recommendations that supports the country's implementation of the Mental Health Act, with continuing support through the WHO Special Initiative for Mental Health.

Department of Health Secretary Francisco T. Duque III leads the call for building a resilient mental health system for all.

"As the COVID-19 continues varying degrees of worry, fear, and concern continue to cloud everyone's minds, the scale of the pandemic's impact has gone far beyond physical health. It has also led to a concerning rise of psychological suffering and, consequently, an increase in the demand for the entire continuum of mental health interventions, from health promotion to specialized health service delivery," said Secretary Duque.

DOH Undersecretary Maria Rosario S. Vergeire stressed the government's commitment to the prevention and management of mental health through the implementation of the Mental Health Act and with the guidance of the findings on the Investment Case Report on Mental Health in the Philippines.

"If we are to follow the recommendations of the Investment Case, we may be able to save more than 5,000 lives and gain more life-years by reducing the incidents, duration, and severity of mental health conditions," said Undersecretary Vergeire. "Guided by the National Mental Health Strategic Plan for 2019-2023, we are implementing the provisions of the Mental Health Care Law, and now through the Investment Case for Mental Health, we would have specific actionable steps to strengthen the whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach," she added.

WHO Representative to the Philippines Dr. Rabindra Abeyasinghe emphasized the significant economic impact of mental health conditions and urged the country's decision-makers to prioritize investments to support people suffering from key mental health conditions.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a silent pandemic of mental stress and psychosocial issues in addition to disrupting the limited available resources for mental, neurological, and substance use disorder in the country. The insights presented by the Investment Case Report supports evidenced-based opportunities to reduce the adverse health impacts of mental health conditions as well the economic benefits that outweigh the cost of investment," said Dr. Abeyasinghe said.

UNDP Health and Development Consultant Daniel Grafton noted some of the opportunities that can help sustain the management of mental health in the country. Among these were the establishment of the Philippine Council on Mental Health (PCMH) to oversee the implementation of the Mental

Health Act, the Pantawid Pamilya Pilipino Program, and other initiatives being implemented by DOH, Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), and Department of Education (DepEd), and partner stakeholders.

According to DepEd Chief of School Health Division Dr. Corazon Dumlao, “the population-based interventions have the greatest impact in preventing mental health issues particularly depression and anxiety. Investment should be made in enabling mental health professionals, training, and hiring counselors in DepEd for prevention and provision of basic mental health services in schools.”

Dr. Felix Laban Jr. from DOLE’s Bureau of Working Conditions, on the other hand, cited the creation of guidelines mandating the implementation of Mental Health Policy and Programs in the workplace.

The Investment Case Report provides evidence of the benefits of scaled-up interventions to the Department of Finance and other non-relevant non-health sectors. The Report enumerated various challenges the country is facing concerning mental health conditions, including the growing prevalence of mental health and substance use conditions, the stigmatization of people facing mental health conditions, the meager number of trained mental health specialists, and inadequate resources invested in mental health services.

National and international experts who are part of the WHO and UNDP support to the Philippines call on the national government, local governments, public and private sector partners to promote mental health with the following recommendations: (1) strengthen mental health leadership and governance; (2) invest in evidence-based, cost-effective clinical and population-based mental health interventions; (3) include mental health interventions while extending UHC; (4) increase the capacity of the health-care workforce and the health system to provide mental health; and (5) Invest in mental health research and development.