

Draft 1

Seventy-eight World Health Assembly Kingdom of Tonga Intervention

## **Committee A- Pillar 1: One Billion people benefiting from Universal Health Coverage (UHC)**

**Agenda Item 13: Review and update on matters considered by the Executive Board**

**Agenda Item 13.1: Follow up to the political declaration of the 3<sup>rd</sup> high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the prevention and control of NCDs**

**Dot Point 3: Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030**

**Resolution WHA77.3 (2024)**

Thank you, Chairperson.

1. **The Kingdom of Tonga** is pleased to note the Report: **Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030 - Resolution WHA77.3 (2024)** and supports the **decision for a dedicated report on mental health for WHO Governing Bodies.**
2. Home to 105,000 people, 83% of deaths in Tonga are from NCDs and the Government and people of Tonga greatly value the leadership and coordination that s provides in addressing the burden of NCDs.
3. Mental Health tends to be side-lined under the NCD Banner.
4. Mental health disorders are among the top ten leading causes of disease globally. It is predicted that by 2030, depression will be among the top ten leading causes of disease burden in low- and middle-income countries.
5. In the Western Pacific region, it is estimated that over 215 million people are living with some form of mental disorder.
6. The impact of undiagnosed and untreated mental disorders is estimated to be higher than previously estimated with respect to their contribution to Disability-adjusted life years (DALY). However, global data estimates lack precision for countries in the Pacific region.
7. A Pacific Mental Health Survey was conducted in Tonga in 2023 and sampled 452 adults aged over 18 years, [the second in a series of Mental Health Surveys in partnership with the New Zealand Polynesia Health Corridors Programme.](#)
8. The cross-sectional cluster study found that a significant proportion of participants met the threshold for reporting psychological distress (6%) and alcohol use disorder (8.2%).

9. 2% had a major depressive episode(s), suicidal tendencies, and/or PTSD diagnosis. Males and participants aged 18-29 years were more likely to have an alcohol use disorder.
10. Stigma surrounding mental health is an issue in Tonga and impacts seeking medical and psychosocial support, and addressing that issue is a component of ongoing community outreach and awareness programs.
11. Some work to address mental health has been done including:
  - a. The establishment of a psychologist position in the Health Promotion Unit to provide mental health awareness and psychosocial support.
  - b. Mental Health is one of the key strategic areas in the Health Promoting School Program, alongside Healthy Eating, Physical Activity, and WASH.
  - c. The Health Promotion Unit in partnership with other organizations are working to build capacity of healthcare workers and community partners on mental health and wellbeing, raising public awareness, including in work places and providing psychosocial support.
12. Programs include
  - a. The Australian Government's Partnerships for a Healthy Region Community Mental Health Project, implemented by the Pacifica Medical Association.
  - b. Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services (MHPSS) Program for Tonga – a joint initiative between the Ministry of Health, Internal Affairs and Education and Training in collaboration with UNICEF, to strengthen mental health services and accessibility in school settings, enhance community-based care and support, promote mental health and wellbeing, and to build capacity and enhance stakeholders' collaboration.
13. The first 'Calming and Restraining and Safe Practice Effective Communication Training Program for Psychiatric Assistants was conducted in Tonga last month, facilitated by Tongan mental health professionals living and working in New Zealand and funded by the Australia Aid Program.
14. We continue to provide annual MH GAP training for public health and clinical nurses, using the **WHO** MH Gap Training Manual and funded by the Australian Aid Program.
15. Tonga thanks **WHO** and Development partners, without whom these achievements would not have come to fruition.

16. However, Tonga requires further support from **WHO** and development partners to address mental health, including the need for better fit for purpose infrastructure, including a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre.

MALO 'AUPITO AND THANK YOU

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