Report of the second meeting of the Strategic and Technical Advisory Group for Mental Health, Brain Health and Substance Use
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Introduction

In the context of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) agenda and also WHO's triple billion goals focused on maximizing country impact as well as coordinated global leadership, a Strategic and Technical Advisory Group on Mental Health, Brain Health and Substance Use (STAG-MNS) has been established to advise the WHO Director-General on matters relating to mental health, neurological disorders, substance use and addictive behaviours. Members of the STAG-MNS are listed at Annex 1.

The WHO Strategic and Technical Advisory Group on Mental Health, Brain Health and Substance Use (STAG-MNS) was established in 2022 and held its inaugural meeting (online) in November 2022. Download the report of the first meeting.

Following a series of smaller thematic meetings held in January 2023, the STAG-MNS held its second meeting in Geneva on 25-26 April 2023. The objective of this second meeting was to discuss, prioritize and finalize recommendations with respect to WHO’s work on mental health, brain health and substance use, and present them to WHO’s Director General.
Meeting structure and process

The meeting was opened by WHO's newly-appointed Assistant Director-General for Universal Health Coverage, Communicable and Noncommunicable Diseases, Dr Jérôme Salomon, who welcomed the members of the STAG-MNS and thanked them for the work undertaken to date. He recalled that the STAG-MNS had been established to identify and describe current and future challenges in the MNS area and to advise WHO on strategic directions, interventions and activities to be pursued. To that end, he remarked that the STAG-MNS had worked hard to develop a series of recommendations for the Director-General's consideration, to support the work of the organization going forward. He concluded by reminding meeting participants that the present meeting was being held to give the group the opportunity to meet in person and refine a final set of recommendations spanning three thematic areas: strategic value and policy coherence; governance, leadership and service development; communications, partnerships and media.

The meeting was structured around the Agenda shown in Annex 2. Following welcoming remarks, introductions and a review of the STAG-MNS's work to date, the group were provided with an overview of advisory groups supporting WHO's work at the Regional level. The group then reviewed the output of the thematic group discussions and the draft set of recommendations that had emerged from that dialogue, before moving to a detailed consideration and elaboration of the final set to be presented to the Director-General.

These recommendations were duly delivered in person by the group's Chair, Dr. Rabih al Chammay, to the Director-General, who then provided an initial response on behalf of the Secretariat. The remaining part of the meeting was dedicated to considering options and mechanisms for their uptake and implementation.
## STAG-MNS recommendations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic area</th>
<th>STAG-MNS Recommendations</th>
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| **Strategic value and policy coherence**           | - **MNS conceptual framework:** Develop a framework that clarifies the links between MNS and other conditions, their determinants, human rights and outcomes (including on well-being), as well as related policies, guidance, tools, interventions and health system needs over the life-course.  
  - **MNS strategic priorities:** Undertake a strategic review of MNS work areas and address identified gaps or emerging priorities (e.g. long-term care, pre-service training, climate crisis, social media and child and adolescent MNS).  
  - **MNS impact measurement:** Support development and implementation of effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to better measure the impact, outcomes and quality of MNS policies, programmes and interventions in line with international standards and human rights instruments.  
  - **MNS and global development:** Accentuate the contribution of mental health, brain health and substance use service access towards the goals of universal health coverage and sustainable development, including financial protection, poverty alleviation and social inclusion and equity. |
| **Governance, leadership and service development** | - **High-level policy and financial commitment:** Stimulate engagement, investment and accountability through stronger incentivisation and monitoring / progress reporting of (inter-)national commitments to MNS action plans and targets.  
  - **Inter-sectoral engagement:** Promote and support inter-sectoral engagement, dialogue and coordination mechanisms at national and international levels (including health, disability, social service and education sectors, and people with lived experience).  
  - **Leadership development:** Expand capacity-building opportunities for MNS leaders (diplomacy, policy, advocacy, human rights, management, public health and systems approaches) and practitioners (specialized and non-specialized) at national level, including for people with lived experience of mental health conditions.  
  - **Technical guidance:** Assemble and disseminate targeted packages of WHO guidance and materials to national decision-makers and different professional groups, including representatives of people with lived experience. |
| **Communications, partnerships and media**         | - **Media and communications:** Prepare an organization-wide MNS communications strategy for specified target groups and strengthen both internal capacity of WHO workforce and external relationships with journalists and media including cultural and social media, e.g. through provision of dedicated training opportunities, recognition for good MNS communications and stigma reduction strategies, including for healthcare providers.  
  - **Donors and partners:** Identify and build new partnerships for MNS prevention, care and system development, including through landscape analysis and dedicated outreach to previously unengaged donors / partners like organizations representing people with lived experience of mental health conditions.  
  - **Civil society and people with lived experience:** Collaborate with, support and empower civil society organizations, PWLE and other non-state actors to participate actively in MNS policy, advocacy and service development, including through easy-to-read versions of WHO information products. |
Addressing and implementing STAG-MNS recommendations

WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus led the response of the WHO Secretariat to the Recommendations of the STAG-MNS, with further suggestions and commentaries provided by the Director and other members of the Department of Mental Health and Substance Use as well as Regional Officers.

Strategic value and policy coherence

WHO Secretariat welcomed the suggestion to develop an over-arching conceptual framework, since this can help to bring together and show the links that exist between mental health, brain health and substance use as well as with other conditions. Such a framework could help WHO and its partners to promote a more integrated and holistic response to the enormous burden that MNS conditions pose at national, regional and global levels. It can also hopefully contribute to a greater understanding of these stigmatised areas of health, which often co-exist with each other and with other diseases or conditions. Building on the foundations already laid during the meeting by one of the break-out groups, the Secretariat proposes to work on the further development of this conceptual framework in collaboration with the STAG-MNS.

Regarding WHO’s strategic priorities and better measurement of programmatic impact in the MNS area, the Director General emphasised that the planning and assessment of WHO’s work is primarily driven by Member States at meetings of WHO governing bodies, but acknowledged that population needs are always subject to change and therefore require regular reviewing and horizon scanning to ensure that WHO is responding to emerging needs or threats (as so visibly demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic) and is achieving impact at country level. Areas of strategic importance brought up by the STAG-MNS included long-term care, brain health, stigma and discrimination, climate change, youth mental health, quality of care, financing and links between MNS and the broader sustainable development agenda. WHO has activities addressing all of these issues (to a greater or lesser degree), and uses a variety of mechanisms to track progress in implementing MNS policies, programmes and activities at the country level. The Secretariat proposes to prepare a summary of current and future work activities out to 2025 that can be shared with the STAG at or before its next meeting.
Governance, leadership and service development

- The Director-General noted that there had been an unprecedented level of expressed political commitment from Member States over the last few years, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022 alone, new global action plans on alcohol and on neurological disorders were approved, while mental health featured on the programme of four out of six Regional Committees. However, it was acknowledged that implementation is often patchy and held back by a lack of financial commitment or resources at the national level.

- It was suggested that greater accountability can most likely be secured through sustained and/or intensified (technical and financial) support and inter-sectoral collaboration between Member States, WHO and international partners. One way through which this intensified collaboration could be elaborated is through dedicated leadership programmes in the MNS area, since that can offer an effective way to translate the high-level commitments to international action plans and targets into informed action on the ground. Building on the foundations already laid during the meeting by one of the break-out groups, the Secretariat will consider how to expand opportunities for leadership development and report back to the STAG-MNS at its next meeting along with a proposed set of technical guidance packages targeted at leaders and different professional groups.

Communications, partnerships and media

- The Director-General welcomed the STAG's recommendation to further engage, support and empower people with lived experience of MNS conditions in policy, planning and service provision; he noted the recent development of a Framework for Meaningful Engagement of People Living with Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health Conditions, which could usefully contribute towards the objective of closer engagement and collaboration. The Secretariat will consider what mechanisms or fora could be used or developed to further enable this and report back to the STAG-MNS at its next meeting.

- The Secretariat also endorsed the proposal put forward by the STAG to develop a communications strategy that could be used both within and outside WHO to better engage, inform and work with a range of stakeholders, including people with lived experience and their families, journalists, community and spiritual leaders, indigenous practitioners and health care practitioners. The Secretariat will consult with communications colleagues and report back to the STAG at its next meeting.

WHO Director General's full speech can be accessed here.
To advance the thinking and planning around implementation, STAG-MNS members worked in groups to develop more detailed suggestions around what these strategic recommendations should look like in practice. The discussions focused on three of the main recommendations and the table below summarises the result of this preliminary work, as reported by the groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
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| **Development of an MNS conceptual framework** | The purpose of the framework should be:  
- To account for cross-cutting factors, such as stigma, upstream risks, and management  
- To help policies link towards integrated care  
- To frame wellbeing alongside MNS disorders  
- To account for prevention and promotion activities/elements  
- To illustrate synergies and opportunities to increase efficiency and reduce costs of integrated actions  
Key issues to consider when planning and designing the framework:  
- The need to train different disciplines (service providers and healthcare managers) on the concepts and practical implications of the framework  
- Consider upstream factors/risks like perinatal factors, HIV, social determinants (violence, poverty, malnutrition) |
| **Support to MNS leadership** | Activities to implement to support MNS leadership:  
- Develop training activities for MNS leaders  
- Strengthen internal MNS leadership in WHO at regional and country levels  
- Plan for a structured national MNS progress reporting system, which includes selection of core indicators, establishing national team for reporting, and training for the team members  
- Improve the collection and use of mental health indicators, including through the Global School-based Survey and NCD surveillance STEPS survey  
- Develop documents in relation of mental health and different aspects of development, like poverty, and employment  
- Support non-state MNS leaders, especially people with lived experience of MNS conditions  
- Establish a MNS inter-organizational committee within UN  
- Advocate for the creation of multi-sectoral and inter-regional committees |
| **Strengthening MNS Media and Communications** | WHO should consider developing both an internal MNS communications strategy and also external media training on MNS  
- Trainings must acknowledge the tension between ‘freedom of speech’ and the importance of language used  
- Training to include components on self-care as a journalist, exploring role of the media in MNS communication, MNS literacy, guidelines on talking to PWLE  
WHO could create a good MNS communications award, to recognize good MNS communications (potentially under a range of categories) |
Conclusion and next steps

The STAG-MNS has made important advances since its inception in mid-2022. The recommendations made to WHO DG are both innovative and critical. The Secretariat will continue supporting the group to build on its recommendations and to begin working on a set of key deliverables.

In light of what was discussed throughout this second meeting, the Secretariat will provide full responses to the recommendations made, as indicated in the previous section. Once all information has been shared and initial proposals have been made on how to bring forward some of the key recommendations, the STAG-MNS will decide on a smaller set of workstreams to be undertaken in the coming 6–12 months. These workstreams will have to be identified based on urgency and feasibility, but this does not mean that other priorities will not be worked on in the future.

Once early priorities have been identified, WHO Secretariat will begin working on these with the support of the STAG-MNS and regularly report back to the group for feedback and guidance.
Annex 1: Meeting participants

<table>
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<tr>
<th>STAG Members</th>
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| **Leonardo Cubillos**  
  Director, Centre for Global Mental Health Research  
  National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)  
  United States of America |
| **Kirsty Donald**  
  Professor of Pediatric Neurology  
  University of Cape Town  
  South Africa |
| **Chencho Dorji**  
  Professor of Psychiatry  
  Bhutan |
| **S. Benedict Dossen**  
  Lead, Country Mental Health Program, The Carter Center  
  Liberia |
| **Rabih El Chammay**  
  Head, National Mental Health Programme  
  Ministry of Health  
  Lebanon |
| **Cleusa Ferri**  
  Department of Psychiatry  
  Universidade Federal de Sao Paulo  
  Brazil |
| **Chan Lai Fong**  
  Assistant Professor of Psychiatry  
  National University of Malaysia  
  Malaysia |
| **Shayni Geffen**  
  Project leader, South African Federation of Mental Health  
  South Africa |
| **Wei Hao**  
  Professor of Psychiatry, Central South University  
  Head of WHO Collaborating Centre on Drug Abuse  
  China |
| **Olga Kalina**  
  Advocate and Consultant on Mental health  
  Georgia |
| **Kairi Kolves**  
  Professor, Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention  
  Australia |
| **Chido Madzvamutse**  
  Senior Associate, HIV/Mental Health Integration  
  Zimbabwe |
| **Neo Morojele**  
  Honorary Professor, School of Public Health and Family Medicine, University of Cape Town  
  South Africa |
| **Pratima Murthy**  
  Professor of Psychiatry and Director, National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences  
  India |
| **Michael Pietrus**  
  Director, Opening Minds  
  Mental Health First Aid Canada  
  Canada |
| **Kameshwar Prasad**  
  Director and CEO, Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences  
  India |
| **Afarin Rahimi-Movaghar**  
  Professor of Psychiatry, National Centre of Addiction Studies  
  Islamic Republic of Iran |
| **Kiran Teresa Thakur**  
  Assistant Professor, Division of Critical Care and Hospitalist Neurology, Columbia University  
  United States of America |
| **Graham Thornicroft**  
  Professor of Psychiatry, Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience  
  United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland |
| **Chahnez Charfi Triki**  
  Head, Child Neurology Department  
  Tunisia |
### WHO Secretariat

#### Headquarters Office:

- **Dévora Kestel**  
  Director, Department of Mental Health and Substance Use (MSD)

- **Dan Chisholm**  
  Mental health specialist, MSD

- **Tarun Dua**  
  Unit Head, Brain Health, MSD

- **Michelle Funk**  
  Unit Head, Policy Law and Human Rights, MSD

- **Mark van Ommeren**  
  Unit Head, Mental Health, MSD

- **Vladimir Poznyak**  
  Unit Head, Alcohol, Drugs and Addictive Behaviours, MSD

- **Giovanni Sala**  
  Consultant, Office of the Director, MSD

- **Christelle Guillot**  
  Programme Assistant, MSD

- **Glynis Garthwaite**  
  Programme Assistant, MSD

#### Regional Offices

- **Florence Baingana**  
  Regional Advisor for Mental Health  
  WHO Regional Office for Africa

- **Renato Oliveira E Souza**  
  Unit Chief, Mental Health & Substance Use Unit  
  WHO Regional Office for the Americas

- **Khalid Saeed**  
  Regional Advisor for Mental Health  
  WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean

- **Carina Ferreira-Borges**  
  Regional Advisor, Alcohol, Illicit Drugs and Prison Health  
  WHO Regional Office for Europe

- **Ledia Lazeri**  
  Regional Advisor for Mental Health  
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- **Andrea Bruni**  
  Regional Advisor for Mental Health  
  WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia

- **Martin Vandendyck**  
  Regional Advisor for Mental Health  
  WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific
### Annex 2: Meeting agenda

**Day 1 – 25 April 2023**

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<th>Session</th>
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<td>09.00 – 09.10</td>
<td>Welcome by ADG/UCN and MSD Director (including introduction of WHO Secretariat)</td>
<td>Jérôme Salomon (WHO HQ) Dévora Kestel (WHO HQ)</td>
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<td>09.10 – 09.15</td>
<td>Introduction of Chairperson</td>
<td>Rabih El-Chammay</td>
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<td>09.15 – 09.30</td>
<td>STAG Members’ introductions</td>
<td>All STAG members</td>
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<td>09.30 – 09.45</td>
<td>Update and recap on the work of STAG-MNS</td>
<td>Dan Chisholm (WHO HQ)</td>
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<td>09.45 – 10.30</td>
<td>Overview of WHO Regional MNS advisory groups:</td>
<td>Regional Advisors:</td>
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<td>11.00 – 11.45</td>
<td>Presentation of STAG-MNS Thematic group discussion points &amp; draft recommendations:</td>
<td>Chido Rwafa- Madzvamutse Pratima Murthy Shayni Geffen</td>
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<td>11.45 – 12.45</td>
<td>Discussion of draft recommendations</td>
<td>Rabih El-Chammay (moderator) All STAG members</td>
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<td>13.30 – 14.30</td>
<td>Actionable mechanisms for implementation of recommendations (break out groups)</td>
<td>Thematic group moderators</td>
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<td>14.00 – 15.30</td>
<td>Prioritization and finalization of recommendations</td>
<td>Rabih El-Chammay (moderator) All STAG members</td>
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<td>16.00 – 16.45</td>
<td>WHO Secretariat reflections and suggestions regarding STAG-MNS recommendations</td>
<td>Dévora Kestel, Regional Advisors and HQ Unit Heads</td>
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<td>16.45 – 17.00</td>
<td>Closure and plans for day 2</td>
<td>Dan Chisholm &amp; Giovanni Sala</td>
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**Day 2 – 26 April 2023**

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<tr>
<td>09.00 – 10.30</td>
<td>Actionable mechanisms for implementation of recommendations (break out groups)</td>
<td>Thematic group moderators</td>
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<td>11.00 – 11.30</td>
<td>Preparation for feedback session with DG</td>
<td>All STAG members</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.30 – 11.45</td>
<td>Introduction of STAG-MNS members to DG</td>
<td>Rabih El-Chammay</td>
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<td>11.45 – 12.00</td>
<td>Presentation of STAG-MNS recommendations</td>
<td>All STAG members</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.00 – 12.15</td>
<td>Discussion and response by WHO (DG and Secretariat)</td>
<td>Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus Dévora Kestel</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.15 – 12.30</td>
<td>Reflection and refinement of recommendations</td>
<td>Rabih El-Chammay (moderator) All STAG members</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.30 – 14.30</td>
<td>Actionable mechanisms for implementation of recommendations (report back and plenary discussion)</td>
<td>All STAG members</td>
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<td>14.30 – 15.30</td>
<td>Next steps for STAG-MNS</td>
<td>All participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.30 – 16.00</td>
<td>Closure</td>
<td>Rabih El-Chammay Dévora Kestel</td>
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