



**IMPROVING ACCESS TO**

**AND APPROPRIATE USE OF**

**MEDICINES FOR MENTAL DISORDERS**



FUNDAÇÃO  
CALOUSTE  
GULBENKIAN



World Health  
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Improving access to and appropriate use of medicines for mental disorders.

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This publication is part of a series of thematic papers, co-produced by the World Health Organization and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's Global Mental Health Platform. To date, the series covers the following topics.

- Innovation in deinstitutionalization: a WHO expert survey
- Integrating the response to mental disorders and other chronic diseases in health care systems
- Social determinants of mental health
- Promoting rights and community living of children with psychosocial disabilities
- Improving access to and appropriate use of medicines for mental disorders.

Examples from different countries are used throughout this report to illustrate some of the key issues, problems and solutions in relation to access to medicines for mental disorders. The information and data contained in the report are drawn from published sources that cannot be verified independently. The use of examples does not imply that these issues, problems and solutions are unique to a specific country.

The examples should not be viewed as an assessment of countries' overall performance in relation to access to medicines: they are used for illustrative purposes only and apply to many countries around the world.

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## FOREWORD

As awareness of the importance of mental health increases, international organizations face the challenge of providing evidence-based guidance and good practices to assist countries in the provision of mental health care.

The Gulbenkian Global Mental Health Platform and the World Health Organization (WHO) have collaborated to generate information to help meet this challenge, publishing a series of thematic papers on pressing mental health issues of our time. One of these thematic papers, *Integrating the response to mental disorders and other chronic diseases in health care systems*, emphasised that mental health systems should “ensure the availability of essential medicines at all levels of the health system (and allow trained, non-specialist providers to prescribe them)”. This concept refers to the issue of improving access to a selected range of medicines for mental disorders and implementing appropriate prescribing policies.

This is entirely consistent with the Sixty-seventh World Health Assembly resolution on access to essential medicines, which urged Member States to improve national policies for the selection of essential medicines and to promote their availability, affordability and appropriate use. The Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan adopted by the Sixty-sixth World Health Assembly emphasized the need to “procure and ensure the availability of basic medicines for mental disorders included in the WHO List of Essential Medicines at all health system levels” and to “ensure their rational use”.

The present document attempts to provide simple, adequate and evidence-based information to policy-makers, public health professionals and prescribers, especially in low- and middle-income countries, to improve access to and appropriate use of medicines for mental disorders. It is hoped that use of this thematic paper will enhance the knowledge and competence of those health professionals who are at the forefront of mental health service organization and delivery of care in resource-poor health systems. This will facilitate much needed scaling-up of services for people with mental, neurological and substance use disorders.

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This thematic paper was written by Corrado Barbui and Tarun Dua. Extensive input was received from Kavitha Kolappa (Massachusetts General Hospital/McLean Psychiatry Residency, Harvard University). An advisory panel of international experts commented and contributed on various subtopics. Contributions were integrated into a full draft, which then underwent a further round of review, discussion, revision and finalization. We are thankful to Grazia Motturi for the support provided for the development and publication of the report.

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