

Global Mental Health Day

**Trials, Tribulations, and Innovations
in Global Mental Health**

Thursday, November 20, 2025 | 9:00 am to 12:00 pm | Online via Zoom

Plenary 1: The World Mental Health Report



Mark Van Ommeren, MD, World Health Organization

Abstract: Mental health is critically important to everyone, everywhere. All over the world, mental health needs are high but responses are insufficient and inadequate. The *World mental health report: transforming mental health for all* is designed to inspire and inform better mental health for everyone everywhere. Drawing on the latest evidence available, showcasing examples of good practice from around the world, and voicing people's lived experience, it highlights why and where change is most needed and how it can best be achieved. It calls on all stakeholders to work together to deepen the value and commitment given to mental health, reshape the environments that influence mental health, and strengthen the systems that care for mental health.

Dr Mark van Ommeren is Head of the Mental Health and Substance Use Unit in WHO headquarters in Geneva. He has played a key role in the initiation and/or development of a number of inter-agency and WHO initiatives, including the Sphere mental health standard, the IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) in Emergency Settings, the mhGAP programme, the WHO Series on Low-Intensity Psychological Interventions, the LIVE LIFE suicide prevention initiative, the IASC MHPSS Minimum Service Package, the WHO Special Initiative on Mental Health, and the Joint Programme on Mental Health and Psychosocial Well-Being and Development

of Children and Adolescents. He coordinated the writing of the *World Mental Health Report: Mental Health for All*. Born and raised in the Netherlands, he worked for five years for a WHO Collaborating Centre, living in Nepal and Fiji, before joining WHO. He studied at the University of British Columbia (BSc in statistics; MA in counselling psychology) and received his doctorate - on epidemiology among refugees in Nepal - from the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam.

Plenary 2: From Empathy to Equity: Confronting Stigma, Fostering Hope in Global Mental Health

Brandon Kohrt, MD, PhD & Dristy Gurung, MSc, PhD, George Washington University



Abstract: Global mental health is at a crossroads. In the past year alone, millions have lost access to life-saving services due to abrupt global health funding cuts—over one million people lost mental health support almost overnight. This contraction of services occurs amidst a broader cultural assault on empathy, with political movements denouncing compassion as weakness and dismissing caring for others



as toxic empathy. How, then, do we sustain the will to advance global mental health in such an environment? We argue that the lessons of stigma reduction offer a way forward. The *Lancet Commission on Ending Stigma and Discrimination in Mental Health* demonstrates that collaboration with experts by experience of mental health conditions is both a moral imperative and transformative when grounded in evidence.

Collaborations with experts by experience can ensure that we act toward what matters most at the local and individual level.

Nationally and globally, efforts are needed challenge policies that perpetuate human suffering and limit access to mental health care. Lessons learned from identifying and responding to structural stigma can guide how we address policies, funding systems, and healthcare institutions. To safeguard progress, we must confront stigma at all levels, mobilize empathy into action, and collectively move from empathy to equity in global mental health.

Learning Objectives:

1. To understand the role of social contact in stigma reduction through collaboration with experts by experience.
2. To describe the role of structural stigma in shaping experiences of discrimination and prejudice.

Dr. Brandon Kohrt, MD, PhD, is a psychiatrist and anthropologist who has worked for 30 years to improve mental health services in countries affected by war, political violence, disasters, and other humanitarian emergencies. He holds the Charles and Sonia Akman Professorship in Global Psychiatry at George Washington University, where he is Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Health, Global Health, and Anthropology, and Director of the GW Center for Global Mental Health Equity. Dr. Kohrt is the academic partner lead for the World Health Organization-UNICEF Ensuring Quality in Psychosocial and Mental Health Care (EQUIP) initiative to establish

competency frameworks and assessments for providers of psychological and other mental health services around the world. Dr. Kohrt's work also addresses development of mental health assessment tools and trials for reducing stigma in healthcare settings to improve the quality of mental health services. Dr. Kohrt was the scientific co-advisor to the NIH Fogarty Health Research in Humanitarian Emergencies initiative from 2017-2022. Dr. Kohrt was a commissioner for *Time for United Action on Depression: A Lancet–World Psychiatric Association Commission* and *The Lancet Commission on Ending Stigma and Discrimination in Mental Health*. He co-edited the book, *Global Mental Health: Anthropological Perspectives*. Dr Kohrt received the 2025 Distinguished Leadership Award from Consortium of Universities for Global Health.

Dr. Dristy Gurung, MSc, PhD, is a Postdoctoral Researcher in Global Mental Health at the Centre for Global Mental Health Equity, George Washington University, USA. She holds an MSc and PhD in Global Mental Health from King's College London, with over a decade of experience leading multi-country implementation research focused on stigma reduction, stakeholder engagement, and integration of mental health into primary care. Her work centers on co-developing and evaluating interventions with People with Lived Experience (PWLEs), lay health workers, and community stakeholders to strengthen health systems in low- and middle-income countries and underserved settings in high-income contexts. Until 2025, Dr. Gurung was based in Nepal and worked for Transcultural Psychosocial Organization Nepal leading numerous studies on stigma reduction including the NIMH-funded randomized controlled trial RESHAPE trial in Nepal, which tested a contact-based stigma reduction intervention in primary care training. She also pioneered participatory approaches such as photovoice, enabling PWLEs to share recovery narratives with health workers and policymakers. Dr. Gurung was a commissioner on the *Lancet Commission on Ending Stigma and Discrimination in Mental Health* and chaired the global launch of its report. In 2023, she received the Visionary Innovators Shaping Tomorrow's Advancements (VISTA) Award from the National Institute of Mental Health for her contributions as an early-career researcher.

Plenary 3: The need for reimagining Global mental health in Africa

Dawit Wondimagegn MD, Addis Ababa University



Learning Objectives:

After attending this talk participants will be able to:

1. Discuss the current state of mental health in Africa
2. Identify challenges and opportunities for reimagining mental health care in Africa
3. Discuss the impacts of the global efforts to improve mental health care in Africa

Dr. Dawit Wondimagegn is Chief Executive Director of the College of Health Sciences and Vice President of Addis Ababa University and was chair of the Addis Ababa University, Department of Psychiatry and the former Director of Graduate Programs for the Addis Ababa University (AAU) College of Health Sciences in Ethiopia. Through his numerous activities as a clinical and health systems leader, global mental health expert, IPT expert, and researcher, he is helping to decrease stigma and improve access to mental healthcare. An Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at AAU, he co-leads

with Clare Pain and Brian Hodges, the Toronto Addis Ababa Academic Collaboration to develop post-graduate subspecialty training programs in numerous areas of medicine, primary care and nursing in Ethiopia. He has published in the areas of global mental health, family medicine, medical ethics, psychotherapy knowledge translation, and post-partum depression. He was a primary investigator of two Grand Challenges Canada funded projects – one with co-PI Clare Pain, The Biaber Project, to scale up screening and mental health care in Ethiopian primary care settings; and to engage with Ethiopian traditional healers, using a collaborative care model to increase the identification and treatment of psychiatric disorders. He has culturally adapted IPT for Ethiopia (IPT-E) and led IPT workshops for psychiatry residents at AAU and University of Toronto. The Biaber Project enabled the training of >500 Ethiopian primary care nurses in IPT-E.

the Addis Ababa University (AAU) College of Health Sciences in Ethiopia. Through his numerous activities as a clinical and health systems leader, global mental health expert, IPT expert, and researcher, he is helping to decrease stigma and improve access to mental healthcare. An Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at AAU, he co-leads with Clare Pain and Brian Hodges, the Toronto Addis Ababa Academic Collaboration to develop post-graduate subspecialty training programs in numerous areas of medicine, primary care and nursing in Ethiopia. He has published in the areas of global mental health, family medicine, medical ethics, psychotherapy knowledge translation, and post-partum depression. He was a primary investigator of two Grand Challenges Canada funded projects – one with co-PI Clare Pain, The Biaber Project, to scale up screening and mental health care in Ethiopian primary care settings; and to engage with Ethiopian traditional healers, using a collaborative care model to increase the identification and treatment of psychiatric disorders. He has culturally adapted IPT for Ethiopia (IPT-E) and led IPT workshops for psychiatry residents at AAU and University of Toronto. The Biaber Project enabled the training of >500 Ethiopian primary care nurses in IPT-E.