



# Christian Conference of Asia

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## CCA General Secretary's Statement on World Mental Health Day–2021

### 'Mental healthcare for all: let's make it a reality'

Mental health and mental illnesses continue to be a major concern all over the world. About one billion people in the world today have a mental disorder. Depression is a major cause for intensifying the burden of this disease. A person can experience poor mental health and not be diagnosed with a mental illness. Likewise, a person diagnosed with a mental illness can experience periods of physical, mental, and social well-being. Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being, determining how we handle stress and adverse life situations, relate to others, and make choices. It is estimated that at least five percent of adults in the world suffer from depression, and increasing numbers of people affected with long-term mental disorders such as schizophrenia tend to die earlier than the normal population. One in every 100 deaths happens by suicide, mainly among young people.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a considerable impact on people's mental health and this pandemic has disrupted or halted critical mental health services in most countries worldwide while the demand for mental health is increasing. A survey conducted by the World Health Organisation in 130 countries reveals the devastating impact of COVID-19 on access to mental health services. Spikes in heavy psycho-social burdens, anxieties around virus transmission, the psychological impact of lockdowns and involuntary self-isolation, loss of employment, financial worries, and social alienation have collectively contributed to increasing levels of mental health problems during this pandemic.

The theme of World Mental Health Day–2021, "Mental health care for all: let's make it a reality", is very relevant in the current context. The gravity of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic reminds us that the increasing trend of people's mental ill-health cannot be overlooked, especially in the Asian context where adequate attention has not yet been given to address the concern of mental ill-health.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the urgent need for the expansion of equitable infrastructure for mental healthcare, with emphasis on accessibility to everyone in need. Tele-counseling, e-mental health services, online consultations, and other digital communication tools can prove effective in reaching out to those in need. In the context of the ongoing pandemic, mental healthcare must address COVID-19–related stresses such as exposure to the virus, infected family members, loss of loved ones, and physical and emotional vulnerability.

Although the problem of mental ill-health has seen a visible increase in our times, we should not forget that people at all times in history have had to face such problems. Psalm 88 is sometimes taken as a passage that speaks very closely to the experience of depression. The psalmist expressed the feelings of being cut off and forgotten by God and then laments: "You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths. Your wrath lies heavily on me; you have overwhelmed me with all your waves. You have taken from me my closest friends and have made me repulsive to them. I am confined and cannot escape; my eyes are dim with grief." (Psalm 88:6-9).

The Church has an important role in addressing mental health within the community. Misconceptions around mental health and the stigma that is attached by the Church and its leaders are not uncommon. A greater understanding on the holistic nature of mental health is needed for the Church in Asia in order to provide vital psychosocial support and care for those with mental illnesses and their families. The Church can also play an instrumental role in providing references to those in distress and be the bridge between the community and the service providers. Promoting correct knowledge and right information remain key factors in creating a safe environment for mental wellbeing and recovery from mental illnesses.

The experiences of the adherents of all religions point to the fact that spirituality more broadly can be beneficial for recovery and wellbeing and that people need to be cautious of their spiritual and religious needs addressed within the medical and care sectors. However, there is need for spiritual resources that allow people to embrace medical science and prevent the danger of "over-spiritualising" problems.

The Church in Asia needs to design creative programmes to help people understand and respond to mental health issues and envision programmes that will help congregations to realise the urgent need for initiating and engaging members in mental health ministry.

On the occasion of the World Mental Health Day, the CCA urges its member churches and councils to address mental health in an effective and efficient manner by providing and facilitating mental healthcare for all, and make it a reality.

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General Secretary, CCA