

Klara Södra Kyrkogata 20
111 52 Stockholm

Maik Dünnbier
Director of Strategy and Advocacy
Movendi International

T: +46 721 555 036
info@movendi.ngo
www.movendi.ngo

MOVENDI INTERNATIONAL STATEMENT

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WHO EB 148 AGENDA ITEM 14.3: MENTAL HEALTH PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE FOR THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC (EB148/20)

Movendi International thanks the Director-General for an excellent report. We especially welcome the planned Secretariat activities outlined.

As all speakers, we remain concerned about the fact that mental health is one of the most neglected areas of health and development. Consider alcohol use disorder, one of the most pervasive mental health problems of our time: almost a third of countries have near zero treatment coverage; and shockingly, 40% of countries reporting to WHO said they do not even know the level of treatment coverage for alcohol use disorder.

If anything, these problems are being exacerbated during the pandemic:

- For some, alcohol use has further increased, pushing them into alcohol use disorder.
- The alcohol industry keeps promoting their products as coping tools during the pandemic, fueling addiction.
- Essential services, community support groups – many run by our members and partners – are closed, leaving people alone with their alcohol and other mental health problems.

Of course, alcohol problems are just one element of the mental health burden. But they are associated with almost every mental disorder, according to the WHO. Therefore they are illustrative of the urgent need for action and what must be done:

Each of the five planned Secretariat activities in support of countries are important. And they are all interconnected:

- They benefit from the implementation of the WHO SAFER technical package of the five most cost-effective alcohol policy solutions.
- For instance, alcohol taxation helps reduce the overall mental health burden and to raise much needed resources to invest in healthcare; and screening and brief intervention is effective in helping people overcome their mental health problems.

With this potential in mind, we call on WHO and Member States to make SAFER a key element of mental health preparedness action during and in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Thank you.

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