

# Investing in mental health is vital for Bhutan's human capital

Development Partners Group  
November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021

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# Outline of presentation

Why mental health?

UN recommendations



Why mental health?



# Good and poor mental health



- Good mental health is a state of well-being for realizing our abilities, coping with stress, working productively and contributing to our communities (WHO definition)
- Poor mental health is a leading cause of childhood and youth death, saps children and youth of their potential, and carries high societal and healthcare costs



# Key national data points

- There were more than 4,200 cases related to mental and behavioral disorders in 2017 and 6,858 cases in 2020 <sup>1</sup>
- Depression Incidence (per 10,000 population) has risen from 6.0 (2017) to 10.4 (2019) <sup>2</sup>
- Suicide ranks among the top six leading causes of deaths <sup>3</sup>
- From 2009-2013, there was a total of 361 suicides: an average of 73 suicide cases per year or 6 per month <sup>4</sup>
- From 2018-2020, there was a total of 283 suicides: an average of 94 suicide cases per year or 8 per month <sup>5</sup>
- Despite case increases, over the last five years, the annual budget allocation to mental health has remained under BTN 3.5 million (less than USD 50,000) <sup>5</sup>

1. [Annual Health Bulletin-2017.pdf \(moh.gov.bt\)](#) and 2020 communicated by Department of Public Health, Ministry of Health.

2. [Microsoft Word - Bulletin\\_2020\\_Final \(1\)19-5-2020 \(moh.gov.bt\)](#)

3. Damber Kumar Nirola. SUICIDE: "Every 40 seconds, someone loses their life to suicide." Editorial, Bhutan Health Journal. 2019, 5:2.

4. Kuenzang Lhaden. Suicide trends in Bhutan from 2009 to 2013. Journal of Bhutan Studies. 2014;30.

5. National Council Social and Cultural Affairs Committee 2021 Review report on Suicide and Mental Health Issues in Bhutan.

# There is a new momentum



- The SDGs call for the promotion of mental health and well-being as a public good, and to address substance abuse as part of the global development agenda
- COVID-19 has raised the visibility and relevance of mental health and psychosocial support in new and important ways, highlighting that *mental health problems can affect anyone*, creating a window for dialogue, action and investment
- At any stage of our lives, any one of us may find ourselves at different points on the mental health continuum – from experiencing positive mental health, with the ability to cope well with both good days and the bad, to encountering periods of serious distress to suffering long-term and disabling conditions
- Promoting mental health and addressing mental ill-health require a *whole-of-government, whole-of-society, whole-of-lifecycle* approach; *collective communication, commitment and action* must be *substantial and sustained*

# Ten UN recommendations

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The COVID-19 pandemic offers us a unique moment to rethink mental health – there is a need to communicate, commit, and act



# Ten UN recommendations



1. Call for a *High-level National Forum* on mental health before end of 2021
2. Conduct an *economic investment case* and calculate the cost of *inaction*
3. Promote *parenting* skills and knowledge
4. Reduce *stigma* and create more *inclusive* environments
5. Increase the *availability* of accessible, quality and acceptable mental health services *through PHC* including for *vulnerable groups*
6. Strengthen youth, village health workers' and community leaders' mental well-being *capacity-building* initiatives
7. Ensure that schools are *safe and inclusive*
8. Strengthen strategies to *prevent* substance abuse and suicide
9. End *gender-based violence*
10. Tackle the *impact* of poverty and unemployment