



## Centre for Public Mental Health

*Strengthening public mental health in Africa*

The Centre for Public Mental Health (CPMH) is a joint initiative of the Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and the Department of Psychology at Stellenbosch University (SU). The CPMH was conceived on the background of:

- Growing recognition that mental health is a crucial public health and development issue in low and middle-income countries (LMICs).<sup>1,2,3</sup>
- The importance of the overall policy, service and legislative framework that enables governments to address mental health systematically as a major public health and development issue and deliver evidence-based interventions.
- The urgent need to improve and strengthen professional mental health capacity in Africa and other LMICs.<sup>4</sup>
- There are currently no Centres that offer training and research in this area on the African continent.

In an attempt to address this situation, and recognizing the numerous benefits of collaboration, the two Universities have established the CPMH as an independent inter-disciplinary academic research and teaching centre for public mental health promotion and service development in Africa.



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- 1 World Health Organisation, 2003, *Investing in Mental Health*, [http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/media/investing\\_mnh.pdf](http://www.who.int/mental_health/media/investing_mnh.pdf)
  - 2 <http://www.research4development.info/SearchResearchDatabase.asp?OutputID=180294>
  - 3 Flisher, A.J., Lund, C., Funk, M., Banda, M., Bhana, A., Doku, V., Drew, N., Kigozi, F., Knapp, M., Omar, M., Petersen, I., & Green A. (2007). Mental Health Policy Development and Implementation in Four African Countries. *Journal of Health Psychology* 12: 505-516.
  - 4 WHO, 2003, WHO, 2006. Project Atlas: Resources for Mental Health and Neurological Disorders, <http://www.who.int/globalatlas>

*“This new Centre, perhaps the first of its kind in the developing world, is a particularly significant event in global mental health. I am privileged to speak at its launch and in particular, to deliver a lecture commemorating the life and work of Alan Flisher, a champion of African psychiatry and global mental health”.* Prof. Vikram Patel

## BACKGROUND

In the past decade there has been a call from the global health community to recognise and give priority to mental health as an essential part of public health in low and middle-income countries. Currently mental disorders account for 5 of the 10 leading causes of health disability, and by the year 2020, unipolar depression will be the 2nd leading cause of health disability in the world. Mental distress and disorder are higher among poor, marginalised and disrupted communities; and among those with the least agency and power within these communities, such as children, women, the elderly, refugees and those with disabilities. Mental ill-health and poverty interact in a vicious cycle, requiring multiple strategies from a variety of agencies.

In spite of these overwhelming needs, many low and middle income countries, particularly those in Africa, are poorly equipped to address mental health. Only 50% of African countries have a mental health policy. In Africa, 70% of countries spend less than 1% of their meagre health budgets on mental health. During the



past 50 years there have been major developments in our understanding and ability to treat mental disorders. Appropriate cost-effective interventions have been developed for most mental and neurological disorders, but these are not available to most people that need them.

A crucial gap is the overall policy, service and legislative framework that enables governments to deliver these intersectoral interventions and address mental health systematically as a major public health and development issue.

There are currently no programmes on the African continent that undertake research and training in public mental health, and multi-level interventions to improve the situation. There is also a dearth of policy relevant research infrastructure for mental health system development in Africa. The WHO has highlighted the critical shortage of professional mental health capacity within Africa, as well as a lack of capacity for the development of policies and planning of services to address the social determinants of mental ill-health such as poverty and conflict.

It is in this context that the CPMH has been established at UCT and SU. While public mental health programmes are beginning to emerge in Australia, Chile, India, Portugal and the United Kingdom, there are no training programmes for public mental health in Africa. The establishment of the Centre will therefore provide an opportunity to pioneer this field in Africa in line with emerging international best practice.

## VISION

The vision of the CPMH is to be a collaborative inter-institutional multi-disciplinary Centre that conducts high quality research on public mental health, and uses evidence for teaching, consultancy and advocacy to promote mental health in Africa.

This vision is in keeping with the transformational vision and social commitment of UCT and SU, and their endeavour to develop research and exchange networks in Africa.

The desired impact is that the CPMH will be widely acknowledged as a key player in the strengthening of expert capacity to all levels of public mental health policy institutions in Africa.



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## VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

- **Public Health:** The programmes of the Centre draw strongly from the tradition of public health. To this extent the emphasis is on developing contextually relevant and culturally appropriate intellectual knowledge aimed at the prevention of mental illness and the promotion of mental health in communities in Africa.
- **Inter-disciplinarity:** The multi-disciplinary dimension of the public health tradition is harnessed in our work. As such, the fields of community psychology, psychiatry, sociology, social work, epidemiology, biostatistics, nursing, anthropology, disability studies, health systems research and health promotion feature prominently in the range of disciplines encompassed by the programme.
- **Multiple methods:** Quantitative disciplines such as epidemiology and statistics are employed alongside qualitative social science approaches to enhance understanding of health behaviours in their social and economic contexts.
- **Evidence-based decision-making:** The Centre places strong emphasis on the use of evidence for decision-making in mental health at national, regional, district and community levels. To this end, an emphasis is placed on policy-relevant research, and the dissemination of research findings to



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improve policy development and implementation that promotes the mental health of communities in Africa.

- **Contextually appropriate theories:** The programme also places a strong emphasis on the development of theories that are contextually appropriate and culturally relevant to the African countries in which research is conducted and from which students are drawn.
- **Leadership and public management:** Training in skilled service management is a focus, including technical competencies for planning, inter-sectoral collaboration, financial management, information systems, quality improvement and human resource management.

- **Participatory approach:** Mental health interventions and services should be based on the best available global and local evidence, as well as the inclusion and participation of communities and those with mental health disabilities.
- **Dialogue and partnership:** Collaboration and learning between academics, policy makers, government officials, practitioners and service users to improve mental health in the developing world is essential. This should promote South-South partnership and support, in collaboration with global roleplayers and funders.

## OBJECTIVES

The CPMH has the following objectives:

- To develop capacity in Africa for public mental health, mental health policy, planning and legislation, through accredited academic teaching programmes.
- To undertake high quality research in the areas of public mental health, mental health policy, services, legislation and human rights of people suffering mental incapacity and illness.
- To advocate for the inclusion of mental health on health policy and development agendas in Africa, using the best available research evidence.
- To provide advisory services to provincial and national government in South Africa, governments in other African countries, and international health and development agencies, with the goal of strengthening mental health policy and systems.



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## 1. Capacity development

The Centre aims to provide innovative and accredited post-graduate teaching programmes that are relevant and accessible to full-time working health and development professionals, building on their professional knowledge and increasing their capacity in these roles. The teaching programmes use technologically-mediated distance-learning modes to offer the courses wherever there is a demand.

The Centre's capacity-building programmes include a two-year, part-time, Post-Graduate Diploma (PG Dip) in Public Mental Health and a Master of Philosophy (MPhil) in Public Mental Health, offered at each university, commencing in January 2011.

Short Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses will be offered from 2012. The short courses will offer targeted training with follow-up for specific groups, such as health planners and development workers, based on identified needs. This might include, for example, a 2-week introductory course on mental health service planning for key provincial health planners. The outcome of such a course would be to equip provincial health planners to conduct a situation analysis of current mental health service provision; a needs assessment for mental health services in the population; set appropriate targets for service development, and evaluate the implementation of the service plan. The delivery



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of such courses will be followed up with monitoring, support and supervision of the trainees.

The content of the capacity-building curricula draw substantially but not exclusively on the modules of the WHO Mental Health Policy and Services Guidance Package and associated training materials ([http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/policy/en/](http://www.who.int/mental_health/policy/en/)), as well as the findings of the Mental Health and Poverty Project (MHAPP) (<http://www.psychiatry.uct.ac.za/mhapp>).

## 2. Research

The Centre provides a physical location and infrastructure for current and future research in public mental health, mental health policy, services and legislation in collaboration with a range of national and international partners.

The research agenda for the Centre is based on the substantial track record in each of the universities. The Psychology Department at SU<sup>5</sup> has an extensive record of interest and expertise in the field of public mental health, as well as, inter alia, culture and mental health, linguistic issues, social and political factors as they affect mental health in Africa, the impact of trauma and violence on mental health, mental health and physical illness (notably, HIV/AIDS), social exclusion and human rights as they affect disabled people in general, and the close association of these to mental health issues.

The Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health at UCT has pioneered research on mental health service provision in South Africa, and methodologies for assessing needs for mental health care at a population level. These norms and standards for mental health services have been adopted by the national government. More recently, research has explored the process of mental health policy development and implementation in Africa and the social and economic determinants that underpin mental health at a population level, as part of the Mental Health and Poverty Project.<sup>6</sup> The initial activities of the Centre will build on the groundbreaking work of the Mental Health and Poverty Project. The new knowledge generated through this study has made vital contributions to the field of public mental health and to breaking the negative cycle of poverty and mental ill-health.



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<sup>5</sup> See the Departmental webpage, <http://academic.sun.ac.za/psychology/english/index.htm>

<sup>6</sup> See the MHaPP website: [www.psychiatry.uct.ac.za/mhapp](http://www.psychiatry.uct.ac.za/mhapp)





The research agenda will address the following questions:

- How is knowledge about services & mental health needs used in policy formulation, and what are the factors that obstruct or facilitate mental health policy formulation & implementation?
- What are the key social & economic determinants of mental health, and what interventions are needed to break the cycle of mental ill-health & poverty?
- What is the validity & reliability of assessment instruments in a context of cultural and linguistic diversity?
- What is the prevalence & risk factors for mental illness in Africa, and what are the mental health needs amongst special populations e.g. people living with HIV/Aids, refugees, the disabled, mothers and infants?
- How effective & accessible are mental health interventions and what factors influence their utilisation?

- What cost-effective interventions are required for mental health promotion & prevention of mental illness in Africa?

The Centre will enable the ongoing development of this research agenda, and provide an organisational infrastructure for future grant applications and innovative research.

### 3. Advocacy

Through the development of capacity, research and consultancy, the Centre provides a key resource for advocacy for mental health. Mental health must be included on health and development policy agendas, both nationally and internationally in Africa, and the Centre has committed itself to this goal. The Centre also advocates actively for the human rights of people living with mental disorders; and provides evidence for cost-effective interventions that can be used for the development and delivery of services.

Advocacy will be facilitated by a commitment to disseminate research evidence using multiple strategies (e.g. print and electronic media, brochures, posters, letters, and presentations to key decision-makers).

### 4. Advisory Services

The Centre aims to provide advisory services to local, provincial and national government, as well as other African countries in the development and implementation of mental health policy. This may include, for example, consultancy in partnership with

WHO, to assist the development of a mental health policy in a specific African country; review of mental health services in a particular province or district; the development of management information systems for mental health services; or the development of a human resource development plan for mental health services for a specific African country.

As a mark of its strong academic orientation, the Centre will endeavour to publish the process and outputs of advisory work in accredited academic peer review journals where ever possible.

### **Governance & Faculty**

The Centre has offices in the Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health at UCT and the Department of Psychology at SU, and uses the seminar rooms, teaching and library facilities available in both Departments. The Centre is headed by a Director and employs various staff in full and part-time capacity. The Director and the Centre are accountable to a Management Board and advised by an international Advisory Panel (see Figure 1).

The Centre capitalizes on the international reputations of academic excellence in the field of public mental health of the collaborating departments, their excellent facilities and rich human resources.

The collaborating universities are two of the oldest universities in South Africa, and have each developed reputations of academic excellence in their own rights, across the African continent and internationally. They are committed to social transformation and the development of research networks across Africa, and have demonstrated their support of the strategic value of the Centre by providing resources and start-up funding to enable the establishment of the Centre.



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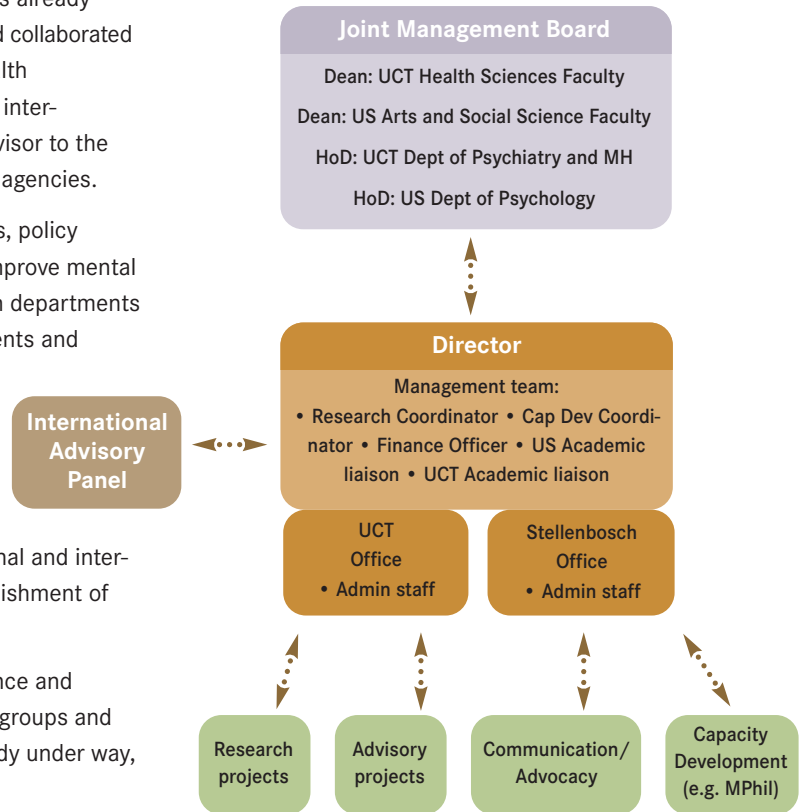
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The collaborating departments are ideally suited to pioneer this work in Africa. At SU the project is led by Prof Leslie Swartz who has already participated in a number of WHO initiatives, has published and collaborated extensively, and is known to the local and global mental health community. At UCT the project is led by Prof Crick Lund, an internationally recognised expert in public mental health and advisor to the WHO, South African and African governments and research agencies.

Furthermore, collaboration and learning between academics, policy makers, government officials, practitioners and clients to improve mental health in the developing world is essential. Fortunately, both departments have established links with a number of academic departments and health ministries in African countries which will serve as a foundation for development of the Centre. The proposal for the establishment of the CPMH has been strongly supported by the WHO Department of Mental health and Substance Dependence in Geneva and the WHO African Regional office in Brazzaville. In addition, a number of national and international experts have expressed their support for the establishment of the Centre.

The Centre is committed to building on established experience and expertise among NGOs, service providers, academics, user groups and government partners, and supplementing work that is already under way, rather than duplicating or competing with existing efforts.

**Figure 1. Governance and management structure**



## Enquiries

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