

It's Time We Prioritize Mental Health like Physical Health

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Mental health has long been the silent backbone of human well-being [1], yet it continues to be marginalized in both public discourse and healthcare systems. While we've made strides in treating visible illnesses, the invisible ones—depression, anxiety [2], trauma, and other mental health disorders—still carry stigma and often go untreated. It is time, now more than ever, to elevate mental health to the forefront of our global health agenda [3].

The World Health Organization estimates that one in eight people worldwide lives with a mental disorder. The COVID-19 pandemic [4], economic instability, social isolation, and displacement due to conflict have only intensified this crisis. Yet, most countries allocate less than 2% of their health budgets to mental health care. This is not just a health issue—it's a socioeconomic one. Untreated mental illnesses cost the global economy trillions of dollars annually in lost productivity and care costs [5].

Beyond economics lies a deeper human cost. People suffering in silence lose not only years of productive life, but often their very sense of self. For youth, mental illness can derail education and development. For adults, it can destroy careers [6], families, and hope. And for the elderly, it often goes undetected, dismissed as “part of aging.”

We must challenge the stigma. Mental illness is not weakness, and recovery is not simply a matter of willpower. Just like we don't shame people with heart disease or cancer, we should not shame those who battle depression or PTSD. Media, policymakers, schools, workplaces, and families all have roles to play in creating an environment where people feel safe seeking help [7]. Investing in mental health is not a luxury—it is a necessity. From community-based counseling and school mental health programs to digital mental health innovations, solutions exist. What's lacking is commitment [8].

As a society, we need to speak more, judge less, and care deeper. Because there is no health without mental health [9, 10].

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