

ADVOCATING FOR BETTER MENTAL HEALTH POLICIES IN PAKISTAN



One of the best ways to tackle the prevalence of mental health conditions in Pakistan – and to fill the gaps in mental health treatment – is by integrating mental health into universal health coverage. This is much needed as, in Pakistan, there is still a gap in service coverage of [common mental health conditions of up to 90%](#).

THE OPPORTUNITY

Achieving universal health coverage (UHC) is a primary objective of Pakistan's healthcare sector – as set out in the [National Health Vision 2016-2025](#). The focus of this UHC vision has primarily been on physical health, with no separate budget allocation for mental health under Pakistan's UHC framework. Now there is a unique opportunity to address this gap – through Taskeen Health Initiative's partnership with the Federal Government, the Pakistan Mental Health Coalition, and Pakistan's Country

Coordinating Mechanism (CCM) for the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, which is preparing to apply for funds for HIV & TB treatment as part of its UHC programs through the its Grant Cycle 7 (GC7).

PARTNERING FOR IMPACT

UnitedGMH has helped Taskeen formulate a three-year advocacy strategy and an accompanying communications plan centering on identifying gaps in the country's mental health infrastructure and engaging key stakeholders to address them. A key component of this strategy is a comprehensive review and revision of existing mental health legislation and UHC-related policies, in collaboration with the government.

MAJOR ADVOCACY SUCCESSSES

With UnitedGMH's support, Taskeen Health Initiative scored several significant advocacy successes.

Taskeen:

- supported the establishment of a National Mental Health Crisis Taskforce under the auspices of the President's Office and the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination, with the aim of integrating mental health into UHC reforms
- played a vital role in advocating for the decriminalisation of suicide in Pakistan – reforming legislation that had stood since 1860 to allow suicide survivors to access mental health services and reduce the stigma associated with suicide
- is collaborating with provincial governments, the Ministry of Health, policy makers and funding organisations to launch a national mental health helpline and an awareness campaign, aimed at bridging the gap in mental health services across the country.

“The relationship with UnitedGMH has been very conducive and we have received enormous support and guidance from the consultancy. We are looking forward to another year of sustainable efforts.”

Dr. Taha Sabri, co-founder and COO, Taskeen Health Initiative

NEXT STEPS

- Taskeen has facilitated numerous meetings of the national mental health crisis taskforce and will continue to push for the integration of mental health into UHC reforms throughout 2023.
- The national toll-free mental health helpline is expected to launch in the second quarter of 2023. Taskeen is leading the effort to encourage people to use the helpline and is advocating for all provincial governments to replicate the initiative.
- Taskeen is collaborating with policymakers to develop a new mental health bill, which will aim to establish a national mental health authority to regulate mental health services.
- Awareness-raising campaigns will be developed by Taskeen to support law enforcement and medical personnel in assisting suicide survivors or those with suicidal thoughts.