

Launch of the Asia Pacific Community Mental Health Development Project Summary Report

An international consortium of mental health reformers will showcase a landmark project detailing community mental health reforms across Asia, that have achieved new benchmarks in culturally sensitive and effective mental health care. The report will be launched at the World Psychiatric Association World Congress in Prague on 21 September.

Mongolia: Best practice was a mental health service run from portable 'gers' or 'yurts', traditional round dwellings made from wooden structures and felt frames. The gers replicate standard living situations so patients with mental illness can be rehabilitated in general life skills such as cooking and cleaning.

China: Chinese Government jointly with AAMH ran a major reform project from 60 different sites, each reaching a population of 400,000 people. The project reflected China's move to community-based mental health reform. The Shanxi Province site moved away from a 'locked-in' hospital approach and encouraged family access, reflecting the importance of family relationships. Family members were provided with beds and facilities to live side-by-side with their relative, and more actively support recovery.

These are just two examples of the new holistic and community based initiatives in the 14 countries documented in the report. Other countries involved are Cambodia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam.

The Asia-Pacific Community Mental Health Development Project is led by Asia Australia Mental Health (AAMH), a consortium of St. Vincent's Health, the University of Melbourne's Department of Psychiatry and Asialink.

"This project is not just about planting western ideas onto Asian communities. This is the first time that mental health leaders from those countries are sharing what is working for them and their communities. They are creating solutions to problems that we are all facing," said AAMH co-director Julia Fraser.

The publication, supported by the Australian Department of Health and Aging, adapts international benchmarks such as WHO guidelines to Asian audiences.

Associate Professor Chee Ng from St. Vincent's, and coordinator of the project said "While the Asian region does not have well resourced mental health services compared to western countries, the evidence is that efficient, effective and culturally appropriate innovations are emerging that potentially can reform the care given to the most marginalised in society - those with mental illness."

By 2020, mental illness will be the leading cause of mortality and disability after heart disease in the world.

Melbourne-based AAMH is building a mental health leadership network for the future: a network that understands that global epidemics require global solutions and cannot be solved by one country alone.

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