

## Written Statement for the 77th SEARO Regional Committee Meeting

### Agenda item 9.5:

Paro Declaration by the Health Ministers of Member States at the Seventy-fifth session of the WHO Regional Committee for South- East Asia on universal access to people-centered mental health care and services

Honourable Chair,  
Distinguished Delegates,

The NCD Alliance, South East Asia Regional NCD Alliance and all country-level member alliances, commend Member States and WHO SEARO for their proactive steps since the adoption of the Mental Health Action Plan 2023–2030. These efforts, including technical publications, country-level support, and regional meetings, to advance the expansion of community mental health services and foster meaningful engagement of people with lived experience, in transitioning from long-stay institutions to community-based care are important steps toward realizing universal access to people-centered mental health care and services.

However, we are concerned about the mental health crisis in the South-East Asia Region, where over 200,000 people die by suicide<sup>1</sup> each year, and high rates of mental and neurological conditions, substance use, and self-harm persist. The treatment gap for mental health conditions in many Member States remains as high as 90%, despite the availability of low-cost and effective interventions. Additionally, stigma, discrimination, and limited financial and human resources continue to obstruct progress, while high out-of-pocket costs for mental health services further exacerbate disparities in access to care.

We strongly support the recommendations in SEA/RC77/11 Add. 1 and urge Member States to:

1. Increase investments in mental health services and prioritize mental health promotion and prevention through meaningful involvement of communities.
2. Build the capacity of health care professionals to effectively diagnose and treat mental health conditions.
3. Actively engage people with lived experience in the design and delivery of mental health services, ensuring that their voices inform policy and practice.

A concerted focus on mental health is essential for achieving UHC and NCD goals, targeted at promoting the holistic well-being of all citizens in the region.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/376869>