

77th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia New Delhi, 7-9 October 2024

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-centred mental health care and services (SEA/RC75/R1)

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) endorses the Paro Declaration, which focuses on improving mental health care in the South-East Asia Region, home to 260 million individuals with mental health conditions. While progress has been made, such as promoting community-based care, significant gaps remain, with treatment coverage as low as 10% in some countries.

ICN recommends several key actions:

1. **Strengthening the Role of Nurses:** Nurses are critical to mental health care, and ICN urges integrating mental health education into nursing curricula to ensure all nurses can address mental health challenges, especially in community and primary care settings.
2. **Investment in the Mental Health Nursing Workforce:** Greater investment is needed to expand the role of advanced practice mental health nurses (APMHNs), who are vital in addressing mental health needs.
3. **Community-Based, People-Centered Care:** ICN supports the shift towards community mental health services, noting that nurses, especially in underserved areas, are often the first contact for patients. Multidisciplinary teams are crucial for accessible, holistic care.
4. **Addressing Stigma and Discrimination:** Stigma remains a barrier to care. ICN calls for embedding stigma reduction strategies into nursing education and public health efforts to foster inclusive environments.

5. Adoption of ICN Guidelines on Mental Health Nursing: ICN urges Member States to adopt its comprehensive guidelines, which focus on high-quality mental health education, practice, and regulation.

ICN concludes by calling on Member States to invest in the nursing workforce, expand community care, and implement its guidelines to achieve universal access to people-centered mental health services.