



PRESS RELEASE



On World Mental Health Day, Meghalaya announces it's first-ever draft 'Mental Health and Social Care Policy'

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On the occasion of World Mental Health Day, the Government of Meghalaya on October 10, 2022, announced its first-ever draft 'State Mental Health and Social Care Policy' which aims to promote overall mental health and well-being and facilitate appropriate access and care pathways for common and severe mental health concerns.



The draft policy is being made available to the general public for their information and can be accessed in <http://nhmmeghalaya.nic.in/programmes/NMHP/nmhp.html> and <https://meghealth.gov.in/documents.html> for a period of 15 days. The draft mental health policy is a result of extensive research, situational analysis in the context of the State and focused group discussions conducted by key stakeholders involved in the drafting process. The draft policy has been put up in the public domain for the information of all, and also to find some key missing elements, if any, within the policy document. The members of the civil society have been urged to send in their comments pertaining to the draft policy to healthdept502@gmail.com. These suggestions will then be reviewed before the formal launch of the final Mental Health and Social Care Policy for Meghalaya.



Meghalaya Health Minister James P.K Sangma, while formally announcing the draft policy said that universal access to mental health care is an important goal of the State government, and added that the State has achieved a major milestone in the Health sector through the announcement of this draft policy. He also informed that Meghalaya is the first state in the Northeast of India to come out with its own Mental Health Policy.

“The issue of mental health has remained a taboo subject and continues to be widely neglected due to the stigma associated with it. And in the past three years, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health gradually emerged as a silent pandemic that lurked upon each one of us and manifested itself in various forms. This led to an urgency for having a dedicated policy to address the issues pertaining to mental health”, he said at the event.

He highlighted the salient features of the State Mental Health and Social Care Policy and urged the members of the civil society to give their feedback and recommendations on the draft policy. The Minister further informed that the Core committee and subcommittee were formed in order to guide the process of drafting the State Mental Health Policy to make it well-suited to tackle the issues that exist within our state.

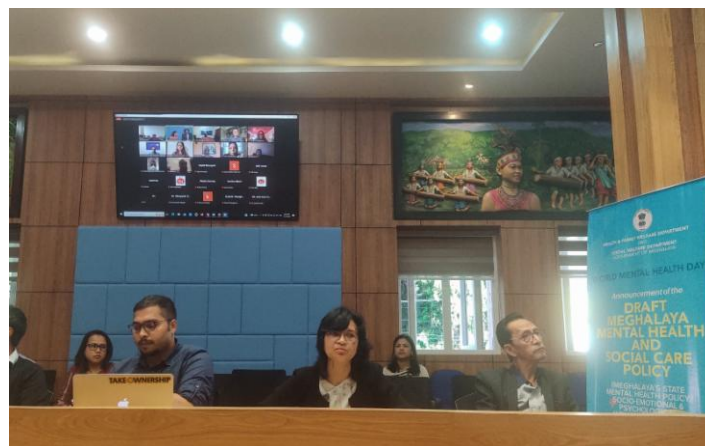
“We partnered with several stakeholders and under the State Capability Enhancement framework, through a Problem Driven Iterative Adaptive (PDIA) Approach, we involved all the concerned departments and agencies as part of our collaborative proposition towards problem identification and solving,” he said.



Principal Secretary, Health and Family Welfare Department, Sampath Kumar, IAS termed the day as being significant for the State and added that the policy's objective is to provide universal access to mental health care by enhancing understanding of mental health and strengthening leadership in the mental health domain at all levels. Emphasizing on the significance of Mental Health Day, the Principal secretary said that it is an occasion for raising people's awareness of mental illnesses and removing the false perceptions attached to them. He said that the policy is a holistic approach that aims to not only provide care, but also address the socio economic determinants affecting the mental health space, while creating enabling conditions to address and prevent challenges pertaining to mental health within the State.



He added that it is critical to address the stigma associated with mental health and therefore, through this policy, the intent is to build awareness and leadership at the community level through the involvement of the Village Health Councils (VHCs) as well as through all the 460 Sub Centers across the State, as they can be the 1st point for screening and identifying the issues of public health. Early diagnosis, screening and inclusive access to care will be the significant highlights of the State's mental health policy.



The programme commenced with a welcome address by Dr S.S. Nongbri, DHS-Research. This was followed by a detailed presentation on mental health- issues, challenges and way forward by Dr A.K Roy, Specialist Psychiatry-Civil Hospital Shillong and Nodal Officer, National Mental Health Programme.

The event concluded with a vote of thanks by Dr. Y. A. Phira, Joint Director of Health Services (MI). The event witnessed the participation of core committee members of the State Mental Health Committee including Principal Health Secretary, Sampath Kumar, IAS, R.M Kurbah, IAS, Secretary, Health & Family Welfare Department, Joram Beda, IAS, Secretary, Health & Family Welfare Department and Ramkumar, IAS, MD-NHM among other state officials.

The event also witnessed virtual participation of drafting sub-committee members of the State Mental Health Committee from reputed partner organizations from across the country including members from - National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), The Banyan and Banyan Academy of Leadership and Mental Health (BALM), Sitaram Bhartia Institute of Science & Research, Bethany Hospital, Nazareth Hospital, the Mind and Wellness Centre, North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS), the Listening Tree, policy consultants, P.A. Sangma Fellowship for Legal and Policy Research, MIMHANS, SAMVAD, Athena Institute, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, TSI Consulting LLP, Lancet Psychiatry Commission on the Psychoses, Cornell University, Schizophrenia Awareness Association, Mind Plus, Ludhiana, International Society for the Study of Trauma & Dissociation (ISSTD), NYU Silver School of Social Work, School of Media and Cultural Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, Warriors Connect, Madras School of Social Work, Dept. Psychiatric Social Work, LGB Regional Institute of Mental Health, Tezpur, Assam, MIT-World Peace University and Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai among others.