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NEW WHO MENTAL HEALTH ATLAS SHOWS GLOBAL MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES REMAIN INADEQUATE

Geneva To mark World Mental Health Day, 10 October, the World Health Organization (WHO) publishes the newly updated *World Health Organization Mental Health Atlas 2005*. It shows that global resources for people suffering from mental and neurological disorders are grossly insufficient to address the growing burden of mental health needs, and are unequally distributed around the world.

The 2005 edition is an update of the first Mental Health Atlas 2001, and contains the most complete global data available on mental health resources. It shows no substantial change in global mental health resources since 2001, while there continue to be marked and growing differences in availability between high- and low-income countries. For example, while the survey of 192 countries does show a slight increase in the total number of psychiatrists from 3.96 to 4.15 per 100 000 people worldwide, distribution across regions ranges from 9.8 in Europe to just 0.04 in Africa. This disparity has increased since 2001.

The Atlas notes that many countries continue to spend only a very small proportion of their total health budget on mental health. One fifth of the more than 100 countries supplying figures to the survey spend less than 1% of their health budget on mental health. This is in stark contrast to WHO's estimate that 13% of all disease burden is caused by the wide range of neuro-psychiatric disorders.

"The new Atlas findings reflect the ongoing reality that the world still considers mental health care as a low priority within public health. There are enough scientific and ethical reasons to change this attitude and to invest more in mental health," says Dr Benedetto Saraceno, Director of Mental Health and Substance Abuse at WHO. "Public health planners and decision-makers need to take the mental health needs of their populations more seriously."

The updated *Mental Health Atlas 2005* is the second instalment from the WHO project to examine and strengthen mental health resources worldwide. The Atlas contains a global overview as well as country-by-country surveys covering 16 themes such as: the state of mental health policy, legislation and financing, mental health facilities, numbers of psychiatric beds and professionals, programmes for special populations and the availability of therapeutic drugs.

It includes a wider range of surveyed countries than the first edition, as well as compilation of epidemiological data about mental illness in each country. The quality and quantity of information collected has been significantly improved in this edition through the inclusion of a comprehensive literature search on mental health services, resources and data, and information collected from countries, WHO offices and mental health experts and associations.

WHO has placed the entire Atlas database on an interactive website at: http://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/atlas/

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This innovative tool allows researchers to search and display global, regional and country data from the Atlas, as well as to compare countries and regions and prepare tables, charts and maps for downloading. Country profiles can also be generated online.

The Atlas and the on-line data base are important tools for mental health researchers, policy-makers and advocates. The data and country profiles provide strong evidence that resources must be substantially increased if mental health patients are to be adequately treated and cared for, particularly in low and middle income countries, but in many high income countries as well.

Web links:

Mental Health Atlas 2005 on-line: http://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/atlas/

Mental Health department: http://www.who.int/mental_health/en/

Noncommunicable diseases and mental health: <http://www.who.int/nmh>

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