

## **What We Heard Report: Mental Health in a Global Context**

On March 10, 2021, the Canadian Partnership for Women and Children's Health (CanWaCH) hosted an one-hour roundtable discussion on mental health in a global context. CanWaCH was joined by three expert partners from Grand Challenges Canada, World Vision Canada and the BIPOC Women's Health Network. A total of 32 participants attended the session. Here is what we heard:

### **Populations in need of targeted support:**

1. Children
2. Adolescent
3. Caregivers

Worldwide, suicide is a leading cause of death in young people, depression is a leading cause of disability, and the opioid crisis is responsible for killing over 750,000 per year. For children and adolescents, the consequences of not providing access to mental health tools are far reaching into adulthood. Investing in early interventions that support the formation of healthy habits and lifestyles are essential.

### **Critical gaps:**

1. **Data:** Evidence is needed to know what low-cost interventions and innovations are working.
2. **Funding:** The need for mental health services outweighs the current financial and evidence-based resources currently available.

An objective look at global health programming shows us that mental health was not being addressed nearly enough pre-pandemic. According to available data in the CanWaCH Project Explorer, mental health was the second least addressed global health-related area of focus in the past decade. Mental health does not exist in a silo. Thus, a more holistic approach to health and wellness is needed.

### **Moving forward:**

1. **Community-led and culturally appropriate programming:** Global mental health programming should be intersectional and informed by people with lived experience. It should be created in partnership with and led by the community.
2. **Increased dialogue on mental health:** When conducting global health work, there is a notion that mental health interventions are "nice to have", but not essential. Increased dialogue is needed to dispel stigma and stereotypes with regard to mental health. After prolonged periods of physical distancing and isolation, it is more important than ever to talk about the short and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on mental health.
3. **Youth engagement:** Youth-led groups and organizers play an important role in advancing the conversation on mental health. Today's youth are the first

generation to grow up with social media and a connected global community. Youth hold a unique position to speak out and have a far reaching global impact. Youth-led initiatives are successful because they are able to speak to their target audiences at their level of understanding without additional technical or medical jargon.

4. **Partnerships to push action:** The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed underlying mental health issues around the world. There is an urgent need to address these issues in Canada and globally. While more financial resources are needed to address mental health, time is a luxury we do not have. In the immediate interim, practitioners should seek opportunities to integrate mental health interventions into existing global health programming. Mental health intersects and overlaps with different sectors. Programming from these different sectors can be leveraged to generate evidence and address mental health from multiple angles.

