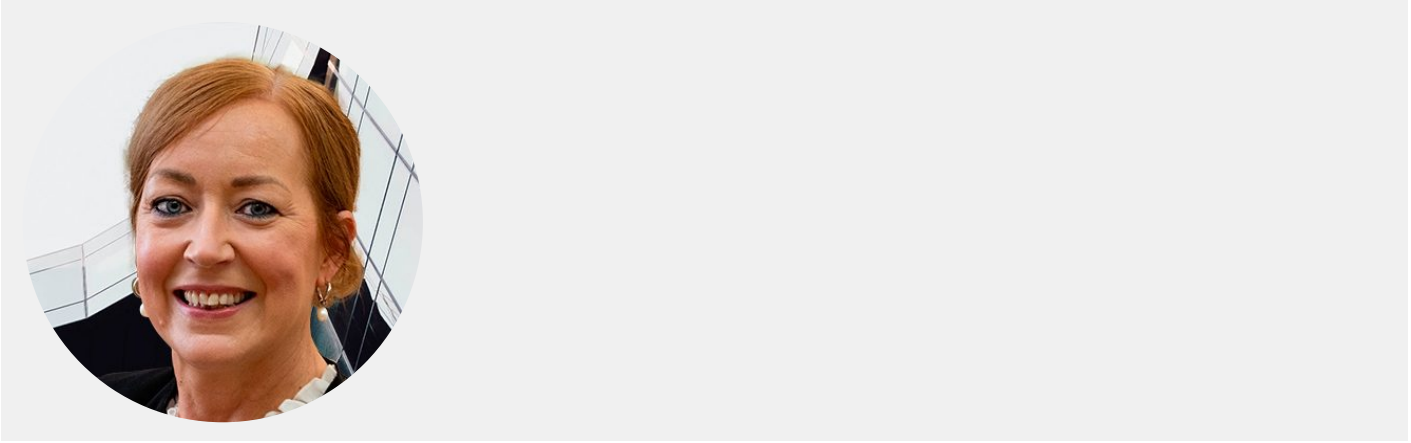
Shaping the Future of Mental Health: A Global Call for Innovation & Policy Reform



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Dr Catherine Duggan, CEO of the International Pharmaceutical Federation, lays out how mental health systems must shift from reactive crisis intervention to proactive, patient-centered approaches; why traditional care models need reimagined funding that prioritises community mental health services and incentivises innovation; and the vital role that pharmacists, as accessible healthcare providers, can play in early symptom identification, stigma reduction, and community awareness.

Imagine a future where mental health and wellbeing is as prioritised and accessible as physical health and wellbeing, embedded seamlessly in the healthcare systems. A world where patients can receive early intervention before symptoms escalate, guided by policy that underpins community support systems and integrates care with everyday life. This is the future of mental health care and it’s more within reach than ever.

Today, this kind of transformation is evident in many countries. Social stigma, policy gaps, and limited resources have long hindered progress in mental health provision and access, but new models of care and innovative collaborations offer a future pathway where mental health is treated with the same urgency and has adequate investment as any other aspect of health.

With a focus on evidence -driven, technology-enabled advancements, the future of mental healthcare can be reformed prioritising patient-centered, innovative care.

In a recent FIP roundtable discussion in October (in partnership with Boehringer Ingelheim), the discussion sought to redefine mental health care for the 21st century. The focus on Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Turkey, and India, we sought to lay the groundwork for this practice transformation. The roundtable invited pharmacist stakeholders to exchange knowledge to inform a mental health care system to address the needs of today and tomorrow and build a blueprint for mental health as an integral component of personal health and wellbeing: scalable, equitable, and stigma-free.

From reactive to proactive: transforming mental health policies

Approximately half of the population will experience a mental illness in their lifetime and nearly one billion people are currently living with a chronic and complex mental health condition worldwide. [i] Evidently, the burden of mental illness is massive which is why, in the future, mental health systems need to evolve beyond crisis intervention to become predictive and proactive. This is only possible through a collaborative, patient-centric and holistic approach. As the various agencies that are eager to bring a transformative reform, we realise that the future requires agile, forward-thinking policy frameworks and enablers. For example, regulatory systems that utilise AI-backed platforms and lead to faster and better patient outcomes compared to the traditional models. This truly sounds like an innovation that can truly help us make a difference to the lives of the patients. The roundtable exchanges and discussions were an eye-opener and highlighted areas of development that can help us achieve a lasting impact:

That the next-generation policies to **focus on the needs of people with chronic conditions**, such as schizophrenia, to overtly include tailored support, long-term care, access to targeted treatment pathways, and a comprehensive framework to ensure solutions beyond therapies for those living with complex mental health disorders and diagnoses.

Recognition of integrating social determinants of health to enable sustainable recovery and improved quality of life. The policies that are crafted to prioritise patient welfare and address real-life challenges. For instance, integrating social determinants of health – including stable housing, regular income and employment, social networks—into mental health policy would go far in creating care systems that are truly reflective of patient needs.

Funding is key to making this future a reality. Right now, many mental health systems rely heavily on traditional models of care and care funding. This puts a strain on resources and delays early intervention. A reimagined funding model would prioritise community mental health services, and incentise the innovations related to mental healthcare that can make it easier for people to access care. This approach does more than expand access—it fosters an environment where mental health care is preventative and integrated, reducing the need for intensive, high-cost interventions down the line.

Ongoing training and development of pharmacists, who are often the first point of contact for patients, is crucial as they may in certain scenarios be the first point of contact for the patients. The training will equip them to identify early symptoms and initiate appropriate referrals and play a pivotal role in reducing stigma of mental health disorders in the community. Their unique position as accessible healthcare professionals places them at the forefront of community health, where their impact can foster greater awareness, acceptance, and proactive mental health management.

Mental health policies for the 21st century

When we put our forces and expertise together, we can create a realistic and pragmatic future for what mental health care can become. Through thoughtful partnerships, progressive policy frameworks, and patient-centred solutions that prioritise community support, we can build mental health systems that are both resilient and equitable. The roundtable discussion was an essential step in initiating meaningful conversations around stigmatised topics such as complex mental health conditions.

Policies of the future all share a common goal: **advancing mental health care.** Through roundtable discussions, we aim to collate existing frameworks to advocate for decision-making that crafts next-generation policies that integrate mental health into national strategies and shaping patient-centred care models to empower individuals in managing their own mental healthcare. The discussions on equipping patients with proactive tools and resources can foster a more resilient, responsive mental health system built for lasting change.

In line with the FIP's commitment to improving mental health care, FIP publications such as Mental health care: A handbook for pharmacists (2022) and the Knowledge and skills reference guide for professional development in mental health care (2022) provide valuable insights and practical guidance for pharmacists. These resources highlight the key role of pharmacists in supporting

mental health, covering actions from preventing mental illness and screening for signs to optimsing medication and responding to mental health crises, reinforcing the importance of proactive, community-focused care as advocated throughout this discussion on future mental health policies.

As we advance toward this future, the question becomes not if but how soon we can create a world where mental health care is truly universal, equitable, and stigma-free. By committing to innovation, collaboration, and compassionate care, we can lay the foundation for a mental health system that serves as a beacon of hope for the 21st century.

The time to act is now!

[i] Nearly one billion people have a mental disorder: WHO | UN News

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