

# National Mental Health Communications Strategy and Campaign





# Background

Mental health, in the Republic of Maldives, has been identified as a key area of public health concern. The importance of prioritizing the promotion of mental health in conjunction with physical health is reflected as a priority area in the Government's National Strategic Action Plan and the National Resilience and Recovery Plan 2019 - 2023 post-COVID-19 pandemic.

Promotion and prevention are key elements of a public health approach to mental health. Given the insufficient amount of research-backed understanding in the Maldives, it is highly challenging to formulate informed mental health preventive care practices and to conduct context-based advocacy and awareness activities. Therefore, a rapid assessment was carried out to understand the perceptions within the community on mental health, which will subsequently inform the directions of the mental health communication strategy, and identify areas of focus for the communication plan within the Maldivian context.

# Rapid Assessment Summary



## Objectives

To identify the perceptions, key issues, attitudes and stereotypes in society related to mental health.

## Methodology

**The rapid assessment was conducted using a desk review and qualitative data collection methods:**

- Focus Group Discussions (FGD)
- Key Informant Interviews (KII)



### **The key groups identified for the FGD include:**

- Stakeholders from institutions and agencies providing mental health and psychosocial services in the Maldives at different levels.
- Authorities and regulatory bodies working with people with mental health conditions.
- Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) involved in services related to the mental health of children, youth, and the elderly.
- Members from general public who represent relevant demographics and vulnerable groups were also interviewed.



# Key Findings from the Rapid Assessment

## Perceptions related to mental health

- **Limited understanding of mental health and mental health conditions** – misconceptions linking mental health with a lack of faith/spirituality or with supernatural causes.
- **Low awareness of terminologies/concepts used in mental health** – mental health and mental well-being are often confused as the same thing.
- **Limited knowledge (and trust) of alternative Psychosocial Support Services (PSS)** – misconceptions related to different mental health conditions and the level of services required.



# Attitudes related to mental health

- **Prevalence of gender stereotypes** – these include reinforcement of gender norms, reinforcing masculinity traits where mental health aspects are not viewed as serious matters, or are not accepted as any other health issue.
- **Stigma** – mental health was regarded as a topic that cannot be spoken openly about. Individuals with mental health issues or illness were perceived negatively.
- **Pessimistic prediction** – some were pessimistic about the prognosis of mental health conditions and held the belief that the condition is unlikely to improve.
- **Benevolence** – caregivers of individuals with mental illness had predominantly compassionate and understanding viewpoints.



# Key issues related to mental health

- **Psychosocial aspects and relevant skills** – parenting styles and low parental support were identified as factors that affect mental health of children and adolescents. Others include limited skills in conflict resolution, anger management, and stress management.
- **Barriers to services and treatment** – difficulty accessing mental health services, financial constraints and mistrust in available services.

## Other findings

- **Increasing resilience** – respondents identified that building a support system within the family and the community can help prevent mental health issues.



# The National Social and Behavior Change Communications Strategy on Prevention and Promotion of Mental Health

The overall aim of the communication strategy on Mental Health prevention is the promotion of mental health and psychosocial well-being, and the prevention of mental health conditions, through strengthening individual capacities and resilience. Further, it will also aim to reduce stigma, and negative social norms around mental health issues, increase positive behaviour, prosocial actions and contribute to strengthen community resilience.



# Objectives of the Strategy



- 1. Strengthen individual resilience and build internal coping through emotion regulation, holistic self-care, and compassion.**

This objective considers the overall well-being of an individual by supporting the adoption of healthy lifestyles, focusing on understanding and regulating emotions, promoting healthy self-care practices and coping strategies.

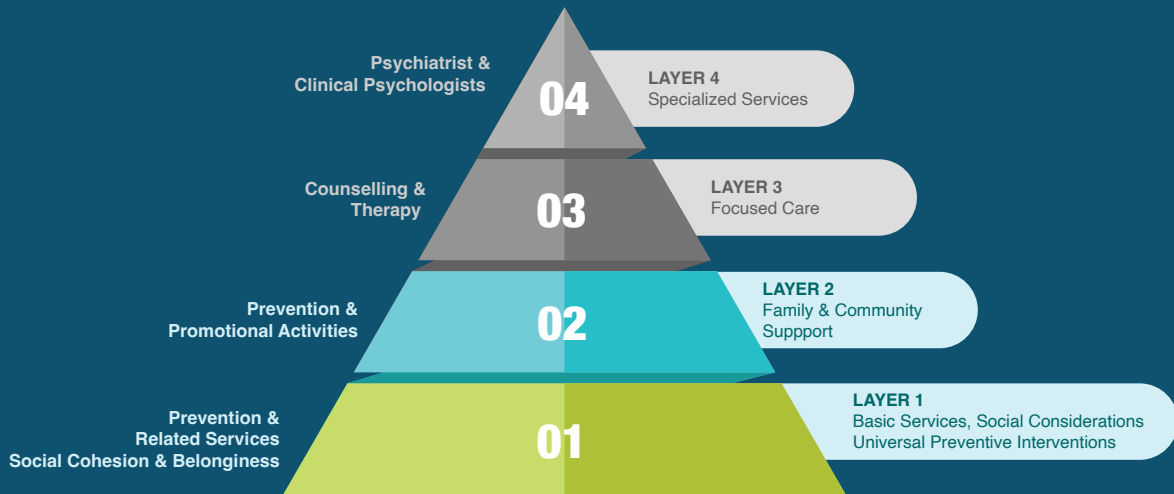
- 2. Reduce stigmatization of mental health issues and people with mental health issues, through promoting prosocial behavior and building community resilience to create a compassionate and nurturing environment for all.**

This objective aims to reduce the stigma attached to mental health and related issues by promoting awareness of mental health literacy and the practice of prosocial behaviors which will enable acceptance and tolerance of differences.

# Theoretical Framework



The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) intervention pyramid.



The strategy and campaign are aligned to level 1 and level 2 of the IASC pyramid.



The strategy is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of the Socioecological Model (SEM) and the Behavioral Drivers Model (BDM) whereby psychological, sociological, and environmental factors that drive behaviors are targeted at the individual, interpersonal, community/societal, institutional, and system/policy levels to promote social and behavioral change on mental health.

# Communication Campaign Plan



A communication campaign plan is developed to operationalize the roll-out of the actions and will be launched at the national level.

# Guiding Principles



- Evidence-based
- Diversity and respect
- Collaborative & with multi-sectoral partnerships
- Clarity and simplicity
- Inclusive

## Key audiences

### Primary

- Children (below 13 years)
- Adolescents (13- below 18 years)
- Adults (18- below 65 years)
- Elderly (65 years and above)

### Secondary

- Parents/caretakers
- Extended family members
- Friends and social networks



# Communication Platforms, Channels and Tools

The ideology of the campaign is based on key messages and information delivered through as many platforms as possible, that are accessible to all individuals which would enable society to change its perception, attitude, and behavior toward mental health in the Maldives.

These include and are not limited to social media, radio and TV, print materials, websites, and through schools, community-based organizations, public-private partnerships, and key influencers.



# Campaign Identity and Branding

The name of the campaign was selected as **Kihineh?** since it is familiar, relevant to a wide audience, and is recognizable as a common phrase to ask someone how they are doing. The aim of the identity and branding is to make this question more meaningful by demonstrating care and instigating connections. Likewise, the campaign encourages to ask oneself how we are doing ourselves and recognize our own emotional needs.



