

Protecting the Mental Health of Health Workers

Frontline Health Workers Coalition

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WORKERS
COALITION

project
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Overview

Health workers face relentless pressure to provide ongoing health services, as well as to address noncommunicable diseases, epidemic threats, and emergencies brought on by conflict, climate change, and other crises. These demands place significant strain on the mental health of health workers, exposing them to chronic stress, overwhelming workloads, and repeated traumatic events, the psychological toll of which often persists long after the immediate crisis has passed. The prevalence of **anxiety and depression in communities of health workers saw increases of 25-28% in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic**, and rates continue to rise.¹ **52% of European oncology nurses stated that their work felt overwhelming and endless**, and that they were unsatisfied with administrative measures in place to support their mental health, **and more than half of American physicians report that they know a doctor who has considered, attempted, or died by suicide**.^{2,3} The threat of physical harm also looms over health workers—the World Health Organization estimates that **nearly 40% of health workers will experience violence during their careers**, further exacerbating the adverse effects of workforce overburdening, inadequate compensation and insufficient professional support.⁴

Under conditions of emotional and physical duress, health workers are unable to consistently deliver the kind of high-quality care necessary to address the multitude of concurrent global health crises. **Greater investment in the health workforce must be leveraged to alleviate stress, implement robust mental health surveillance and supportive mechanisms, and increase the accessibility and acceptability of mental health resources, services, and coping strategies for health workers.**

The mental health crisis among health workers has catastrophic effects on primary care, NCDs, emergencies and other health challenges. Poor mental health in communities of health workers leads to decreased retention rates, severely undermining efforts to close **the impending global shortfall of 11 million health workers by 2030**.⁵ While reporting data is not as readily available for LMICs, heightened rates of stress and burnout have contributed to a **60% increase in the international migration of health workers** in the last decade, jeopardizing already fragile health systems.⁶ The cultivation of stronger health worker mental health will be paramount to the realization of current and future global health commitments. **Urgent systemic reforms and significant investments must be mobilized to alleviate the physical and emotional toll faced by the health workforce.**



78%

of physicians report that mental health is stigmatized among health professionals.³

55%

of medical students report feeling hopeless or without purpose.³



Across 35 countries, **48%** of nurses reported that they had experienced violence and harassment during the COVID-19 pandemic because of their role as a health worker.

Only **24%** believed that their workplace offered adequate mental health support resources.⁷



52% of health workers reported heightened feelings of burnout in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹

77%

of cancer professionals report working overtime, many without additional compensation.²



¹ Abdul Rahim HF, Fendt-Newlin M, Al-Harabsheh ST, Campbell J. Our duty of care: A global call to action to protect the mental health of health and care workers. Doha, Qatar: World Innovation Summit for Health, 2022

² Ceelen, Wim, Mirjam Cru, and Wendy Oldenmenger. *Under Pressure: Safeguarding the Health of Europe's Oncology Workforce*. European Cancer Organisation, 2024.

³ The Physicians Foundation. *2023 Survey of America's Current and Future Physicians: Amplifying Physician, Resident and Student Voices to Drive Wellbeing and Care Delivery Solutions*. Brochure-Report, June 2023. The Physicians Foundation.

⁴ Abdul Rahim HF, Fendt-Newlin M, Al-Harabsheh ST, Campbell J. Our duty of care: A global call to action to protect the mental health of health and care workers. Doha, Qatar: World Innovation Summit for Health, 2022

⁵ World Health Organization. 2025. "Health Workforce." *World Health Organization*. https://www.who.int/health-topics/health-workforce#tab=tab_1.

⁶ World Health Organization. 2025. "International Platform on Health Worker Mobility." *World Health Organization*. <https://www.who.int/teams/health-workforce/migration/int-platform-hw-mobility>.

⁷ Squires, A., Dutton, H.J., Casales-Hernandez, M.G., Rodriguez López, J.I., Jimenez-Sanchez, J., Saldarriaga-Dixon, P. et al. (2025) A descriptive analysis of nurses' self-reported mental health symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic: An international study. *International Nursing Review*, 72, e13099. <https://doi.org/10.1111/inr.13099>

Recommendations

1. **Standardize administrative and staffing systems to alleviate burdensome workloads** that contribute to extreme stress and burnout. As appropriate, **incorporate digital innovations** such as AI to reduce some of the burden.
2. **Increase investment in the recruitment and training of health workers**, particularly in labor-heavy fields such as NCDs, mental health, and pandemic preparedness, to increase the global supply of health workers.
3. **Ensure fair remuneration and institutionalize supportive mechanisms**, such as peer support networks and manager trainings to support staff wellbeing and reduce workload where possible, to cultivate community and emotional resilience.
4. **Implement surveillance mechanisms for mental health monitoring and reporting; provide training, accessible resources, and tailored interventions** to promote healthy coping mechanisms and support a sustainable, effective care workforce.
5. **Introduce and regulate legislative protections** for health workers, particularly for vulnerable groups such as young professionals, migrant health workers, and women—who constitute 70% of the global health workforce.
6. **Reduce stigma** around seeking care for mental health and commit to prioritizing the well-being of health workers.



Amid the unprecedented health worker mental health crisis in the aftermath of COVID-19, **Project HOPE** launched the **Mental Health and Resilience training program**. What began as an adaptation of the *Healing, Education, Resilience & Opportunity for New York's Frontline Workers* (HERO-NY) curriculum has since evolved into a global movement. **Across 41 countries and in 16 languages, the program has equipped over 100,000 health workers with strategies to practice self-care, recognize and address stress, trauma, and burnout, and apply tools to support their mental resilience.** Foregrounding active participant engagement and locally informed adaptations, the program provides practical, self-sustaining skills and knowledge to promote wellbeing and collectively combat stigma surrounding mental health in communities of health workers. Alongside its community-level work, Project HOPE advocates for broader reforms to empower the health workforce, thus improving care quality and building stronger health systems worldwide.



With more than 20% of its undergraduate students alone pursuing careers in medicine or healthcare, **Dartmouth College** has recognized the need to address escalating mental health challenges not only for students, but for health workers worldwide. In response, Dartmouth is launching the **Global Mental Health Initiative**, a bold, faculty-led effort set to begin in 2026. The two-year program will empower health workers and trainees across the world, leveraging cutting-edge AI tools and wearable technologies designed to improve mental well-being and build resilience. The *Initiative* employs a comprehensive approach to addressing the mental health crisis among health workers, from evidence-based interventions and cross-institutional learning, to building global collaboration networks and fostering dialogue and accountability through discussions and symposia.

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