

Policy brief 5

Inter-sectoral collaboration for mental health in South Africa

Mental Health and Poverty Project



The purpose of the Mental Health and Poverty Project is to develop, implement and evaluate mental health policy in poor countries, in order to provide new knowledge regarding comprehensive multi-sectoral approaches to breaking the negative cycle of poverty and mental ill-health.

Inter-sectoral collaboration for mental health in South Africa



Inter-sectoral collaboration required for addressing mental health

There is growing recognition that mental health is a crucial public health and development issue in South Africa (SA). Neuropsychiatric conditions rank 3rd in their contribution to the burden of disease in SA¹ and 16.5% of South Africans report having suffered from mental disorders in the last year.² The aim of the Mental Health and Poverty Project (MHaPP) is to examine mental health policy and systems in SA, with a view to identifying the key barriers to mental health policy development and implementation, and steps that can be taken to strengthen the mental health system in the country. One of the key findings of the MHaPP³ is that in order to address mental health issues in SA and to implement mental health policy and legislation, sectors other than health need to be involved, with clearly identified roles and responsibilities. These sectors are listed in Box 1.

Current state of inter-sectoral collaboration

Some important steps have been taken towards inter-sectoral collaboration, particularly at national level, such as a national forum on forensic psychiatry, to be convened by the Department of Health, with the South African Police Service (SAPS), the Department of Justice and the Department of Correctional Services. The Departments of Education and Correctional

Box 1: Sectors

South African Police Service	Sport and Recreation
Correctional Services	Transport
Labour	Treasury
Social Development	Agriculture
Housing	Justice and Constitutional
Local Government	Development
Public Works	Education

Services have developed policies regarding mental health and the SAPS has developed a 'standing order' which sets out roles and responsibilities for police in relation to mental health. This document was developed with comment from the national Directorate: Mental Health and Substance Abuse in the Department of Health. It is currently in draft form but not yet approved.

At provincial level, there are formal collaborations between the government department responsible for mental health and other departments/agencies in most provinces across a range of sectors. However, activities and interventions aimed at promoting mental health and preventing mental disorders are scarce, and occur only in a small number of sectors. Some provinces have also established inter-sectoral forums for mental health and inter-sectoral collaboration is a standing item on the agenda of the quarterly meetings of the provincial mental health coordinators. However, at the district level, such inter-sectoral collaborations are not common.

Thus, in spite of some progress, findings of the MHaPP show the need for further efforts in the area of inter-sectoral collaboration at national, provincial and district level.

MHaPP recommendations for inter-sectoral collaboration

Respondents in the MHaPP situation analysis voiced the need for the Mental Health Directorate within the national Department of Health to take the lead in collaborating with other sectors regarding the following:

- Establishment of a national inter-sectoral forum on mental health in SA.
- Identification of relevant mental health issues that need to be addressed in the policies and programmes of various sectors.
- Research to provide evidence on the nature and scope of relevant issues.
- Delineation of departmental responsibilities for different aspects of a service to people with mental and intellectual disability.
- Technical expertise to improve the inclusion of relevant mental health issues in other sectors' policies.
- Support in the development of guidelines and protocols for the implementation of mental health legislation and policy.

In addition to these general recommendations, respondents identified a number of sector-specific suggestions for inter-sectoral collaboration.

Education – Technical expertise required from mental health

- Identification and management guidelines for educators working with children and adolescents with intellectual disability, mental health problems and substance use disorders.
- Development of protocols for the management of, and employee assistance programmes for educators with work-related and other mental health conditions.
- Development of a district-based model for the management of mental health disorders presenting in school-going children.

Social Development – Technical expertise required from mental health

- Identification and management guidelines for social sector workers working with intellectual disability and mental and substance disorders in Child and Youth Care Centres.
- Guidelines to identify people with mental and intellectual disabilities for social grants.
- Supportive arrangements for continuation of social grant support during periods of review, and for transitional benefits during job placement programmes linked to reintegration into the workplace.

Education – Responsibilities in policy and programme development:

- Integration of people with intellectual disability into the inclusive education system.
- Support for children and adolescents with mental and related learning disorders within the inclusive education system, through the provision of educational and clinical psychologists and other support staff.
- Promotion of re-entry to learning environments following periods of illness, and the development of a joint approach to the management of children and adolescents with severe mental and developmental disorders.
- Collaboration with the Department of Labour to coordinate basic education outcomes with skills development and vocational training opportunities, and career path planning for people with mental and intellectual disability (a Life Long Learning and Earning approach).

Social Development – Responsibilities in policy and programme development:

- Clarity on the roles, responsibilities and service interface of Health and Social Services for:
 - Children, adolescents and adults with mental disorders and intellectual disability.

- Access to social grants.
- Treatment of co-morbid substance abuse disorders.
- Community-based mental health services.

Housing – Responsibilities in policy and programme development:

- Review of special housing needs policy to accommodate subsidisation of the housing needs of people with mental and intellectual disability, and support to assist with access to housing provision through the national housing programme (family and community residential care).
- Agreement on the responsibilities of Housing (policies to support inclusion), municipalities (provision of transitional and permanent housing), NGOs (support programmes for residents) and Social Development (programmatic funding to NGOs).

Justice and Constitutional Development – Responsibilities in policy and programme development:

- Supporting equality under the law for people with mental and intellectual disability, in the areas of:
 - Inclusive education

Housing – Technical expertise required from mental health

- Eligibility and procedures to accommodate subsidisation and equitable access to housing provision (family and community residential care).

Justice and Constitutional Development – Technical expertise required from the mental health field

- Developmentally appropriate court procedures for child witnesses in the management of child abuse and custody cases.
- Appropriate court procedures for people with intellectual disability.
- Training of magistrates in the identification and management of offenders with mental health conditions.

- Workplace discrimination on the grounds of mental disability
- Protection of the integrity of body and mind in the provision of mental health care services.

SAPS – Technical expertise required from mental health

- Guidelines for the management of forensic and behaviourally-disturbed clients in police custody while in transit to or awaiting hospitalisation.

Correctional Services – Technical expertise required from mental health

- Identification and treatment guidelines for the management of prisoners with mental health conditions, substance abuse and suicidal tendencies.

Labour – Technical expertise required from mental health

- Development of technical guidelines for the implementation of the reasonable accommodation provisions of the Employment Equity Act, with respect to people with mental disabilities.

South African Police Service (SAPS) – Responsibilities in policy and programme development:

- Development of guidelines for the implementation of Section 40 of the Mental Health Care Act.

Correctional Services – Responsibilities in policy and programme development:

- Development of Mental Health Policy for mental health care of prisoners.

Labour – Responsibilities in policy and programme development:

- Clarity on the roles and responsibilities of Labour for skills development, vocational training opportunities and new career -path planning for people with mental and intellectual disability.
- Inclusion of people with mental disability in monitoring employers' compliance with equity targets.

Local Government - Responsibilities in policy and programme development:

- Clarity on the role of local government in including people with mental and intellectual disability in the provision of community and municipal services to disabled people under their jurisdiction.
- Noting how the provision of basic services such as water, electricity and sanitation contributes to mental well being.
- Inclusion of programmes for the promotion of mental well being and prevention of mental illness in municipal health services.
- Inclusion of the mentally disabled in Accessibility Plans. For example, taking their transport, housing and recreational needs into account.

Public Works – Responsibilities in policy and programme development:

- Inclusion of the development of social cooperatives for people with mental and intellectual disability.
- Inclusion of mental health care users in the income-generating projects of the Expanded Public Works Programme.

Transport – Responsibilities in policy and programme development:

- A safe and effective public transport system will promote mental well being by increasing disabled citizens' access to work, social and recreational opportunities and to public services.

Public Works – Technical expertise required from mental health

- Support revised provisions to the development of social cooperatives for people with mental and intellectual disability.

Transport – Technical expertise required from mental health

- The idea of a travel pass or benefit for disabled citizens was suggested to increase access to work, hospital services and social supports.

Other sectors

- **Agriculture:** Provision of technical expertise, information and start-up provisions to initiate and maintain agriculturally-based income-generation projects for people with mental and intellectual disability.
- **Sport and Recreation:** Inclusion of children, adolescents and adults with mental health problems into sporting, leisure and recreational programmes planned for the general population, and for people with physical disability. Support to NGOs and FBOs in the development of programmes to promote social interaction and integration of people with mental and intellectual disabilities.
- **Treasury:** A review of treasury regulations and provisions to eliminate financial barriers to inter-sectoral service provision.

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