

No One Can Whistle a Symphony...

written by Kathleen M. Pike, PhD
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... It takes a whole orchestra to play it. These words from H.E. Luccock capture an essential truth about advancing mental health globally.

In this spirit, we are thrilled to announce that on Monday, February 11th, the Global Mental Health Programs at Columbia University are launching the Council for the Advancement of Global Mental Health Research. With 78 inaugural members in just two months, we are well on our way to passing our goal of 100 members by the end of the year.



The Council will support new investigators and new ideas so that we can advance research to improve mental health understanding and interventions. On Monday, we will celebrate the coming together of people with different perspectives, lived experiences, and skill sets who are united in changing the narrative on mental health worldwide. Moving the needle on mental health is a team sport that includes:

1. Clinicians: Clinicians work directly with patients to ensure access to correct diagnoses and treatment for mental health disorders. They are the face of mental health care, but they are in short supply. Currently, there are [9 mental health providers per 100,000 individuals](#) across the globe. These numbers vary greatly based on location: in [New York](#), we have 40 providers per 100,000, but in low-income countries like [Uganda](#) those numbers dwindle to only 1.13 providers per 100,000.

2. Service Users: Service users are people with lived experience of mental illness. They are experts in seeking diagnosis, treatment, and healing, and they know best what it means to live with mental illness. As one of our WHO Collaborating Centre priorities, we are collaborating with colleagues in the UK and India on research that engages individuals with lived experience to improve mental health services. Led by Dr. Corinna Hackmann, the [Using Lived Experience to Improve Mental Health Diagnosis Study](#) ensures that service users have the opportunity to contribute to improving diagnosis, which, in turn, should positively impact care delivery and recovery.

3. Advocates: Advocates for global mental health include anyone who publicly supports and champions efforts to improve understandings of and interventions for mental health globally. Our new Council represents a diverse community of individuals whose support will help advance new ideas and new investigators in mental health. We are also proud to work with Yasmine van Wilt and Sandra Luckow, our National Endowment for the Arts [Artists in Residence](#), who employ music and filmmaking respectively to raise awareness about mental health needs. We can all be advocates for mental health by talking to elected officials, attending events, and sharing personal stories that change the narrative about mental illness.

4. Researchers: From basic science to translational interventions, researchers aim to increase knowledge and develop evidence-based interventions and programs. Global mental health research can test global standards or target improved mental health outcomes in individual communities. For example, Columbia faculty member Dr. Cristiane Duarte studies adverse childhood experiences among youth in the South Bronx and Puerto Rico in the [Boricua Youth Study](#). This study and its on-going projects have significantly informed our knowledge about the links between childhood trauma and mental illness in both global and local settings.

5. Policymakers: Policymakers have the power to develop guidelines to improve accessibility and affordability of evidence-based medications and treatments. They can also promote positive mental health by integrating mental health services into primary health care and instituting mental wellness activities in workplaces and schools. From New York's [ThriveNYC](#) to Thailand's [National Suicide Prevention Plan](#), when good science is paired with political will, policy advances.

To paraphrase Luccock's words, none of us can whistle a symphony alone, but together - as researchers, clinicians, service users, advocates and policymakers - we are an orchestra that can make a world of difference when it comes to mental health.

We are thrilled to be launching the Council for the Advancement of Global Mental Health Research at Columbia. The Council will establish a Small Grants Program for new investigators and new ideas in global mental health. If you are interested in learning more about the Council, [contact us](#).