

Summary

Protecting the Mental Health of Health Workers: Resilience and Retention for the Future

Tuesday, September 23, 2025, 2:30-4:30PM

The Dartmouth/Yale Club NYC

Overview:

The Frontline Health Workers Coalition and Dartmouth's Dickey Center for International Understanding co-hosted this executive discussion to advance health workforce wellbeing through the exchange of key stakeholder insights. Participants reaffirmed the necessity of collective action to catalyze commitments to health worker mental health. Highlighting the gap between policy and implementation, participants recognized opportunities for learnings and collaboration across sectors, particularly around advocacy, digital tools and resources. Mental health investments should be positioned as a business and economic necessity, a prerequisite for achieving better patient outcomes, and a matter of national security. To this end, participants highlighted the importance of using data-driven recommendations - including the economic impact of poor mental health in the workforce - to make the case for investment to key decision-makers inside and outside the health sector.

Key themes:

Highlight the urgency of the health workforce mental health crisis to key decision makers.

Doctors, nurses, pharmacists, community health workers and their colleagues, particularly those working in high-stress situations such as emergency settings, palliative care, pandemics and oncology are at significant risk for poor mental wellbeing and burnout. If continued to be left unchecked, this will have significant implications not only on health systems, but importantly patient outcomes and the health of health workers themselves.

- Mental health support for health workers is a necessity. Burnout, moral injury, and the systemic lack of trust in health systems and providers must be addressed.
- Policymakers respond to economic arguments - the "dollars and cents" impact of burnout, absenteeism, and turnover.
- A new narrative, backed by a strong evidence base and economic impact data needs to be developed to re-catalyze the resources, advocacy and attention for workforce mental health beyond COVID.
- Investments in the mental health of health workers should be framed as a business and economic imperative, a critical foundation for improving patient outcomes, and a vital component of national security.

Driving implementation through data and adaptable technology. AI and other digital tools hold much promise for supporting the mental wellbeing of health workers. However, it is essential that technology is designed and adapted not only to meet the needs of health workers, but also to ensure it is usable by them.

- The challenge lies in implementation, not knowledge. Proven, evidence-based interventions exist, but they lack scalability and contextual adaptation.
- The evidence base can be strengthened by establishing standardized impact indicators and monitoring frameworks to measure outcomes and demonstrate effectiveness and sustainability.
- AI is a promising new technology, but we must ensure that it is end-user adapted, culturally congruent, and functionally beneficial to health workers and patients. This requires representation from the target user (including demographic, geographic and health worker cadre) in the design process and the foundational evidence.

Create enabling environments for health workers, from the community level. Structural and cultural barriers - including stigma, lack of trust, weak support systems, and inadequate data - are impediments to effective action on health workforce wellbeing despite existing knowledge and commitments.

- Health workers must be central to policy design and implementation, ensuring that solutions reflect their realities and needs.
- Strengthen local and institutional support through peer support networks, trauma informed response training, and context-specific staffing models that combat stigma and reduce stress.
- Foster accountability for health worker wellbeing across the health economy, setting the expectation that employers and boards of directors adopt plans, key performance indicators, and accountability mechanisms that are guided and monitored by professional associations and unions.
- Build a culture that values, celebrates, and protects the humanity of health workers.

Translating commitment into sustained action. While there has been strong advocacy for protecting the mental health of the health workforce, there remains a significant opportunity - AND DESIRE - for collective action to drive greater awareness, investment, and implementation efforts.

- Countries have repeatedly recognized the need for health worker mental health interventions, yet implementation and resources remain limited.
- Policy makers' awareness of health worker wellbeing has largely been linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the need for a renewed and sustained narrative moving forward. Revitalized messaging needs to reflect a broader scope of highly affected therapeutic areas (perhaps NCDs, especially cancer).

- Advocacy efforts should apply clear, evidence-based arguments for the value of mental health support for health workers, including the impact on health and economic outcomes. Engage decision makers, such as health ministers, funders and health systems, as well as finance and social welfare ministers, large employers, and other key stakeholders by highlighting measurable outcomes and long-term savings.
- Rebuild urgency and momentum by building partners across stakeholder groups.

Conclusion:

- The Coalition and the Dickey Center will explore how to facilitate these smaller dialogues so we can continue to catalyze action within the bigger conversation, and find shared metrics to mobilize actions. We will also continue to share opportunities for collective advocacy, knowledge sharing, and partnership.
- The Coalition will explore highlighting protecting the mental health of health workers as the theme for the next World Health Worker Week, April 1-7, 2026. Learnings from this roundtable will inform advocacy and messaging of WHWW. Participants are invited to engage with the Coalition in furthering its advocacy and to recommend additional partners for collective action at WHWW and beyond.
- Participants interested in continuing to engage with the Frontline Health Workers Coalition and Dickey Center should contact Tina (tflores@globalcommunities.org) or Abbey Savin (asavin@globalcommunities.org).