



MENTAL HEALTH POLICIES & ACTION PLANS

Key Issues & Basic Definitions

What is a Mental Health Policy?

➔ A **mental health policy** is an official statement by a government or health authority that provides the overall direction for mental health by defining a vision, values, principles and objectives, and by establishing a broad model for action to achieve that vision. It is important because it coordinates, through a common vision, all programmes and services related to mental health. The policy document constitutes the official government guideline for the interrelated areas for action or directions that will be taken to improve mental health (see figure 1):

- Financing;
- Coordination;
- Legislation and Human Rights;
- Organization of Services;
- Promotion, Prevention, Treatment & Rehabilitation;
- Essential Medicines Procurement & Distribution;
- Advocacy;
- Quality Improvement;
- Information Systems;
- Human Resources & Training;
- Research & Evaluation;
- Intersectoral Collaboration.

To be effective, the mental health policy should be accompanied by an action plan that concretely specifies the specific actions that will be out in place to achieve the policy objectives.

Glossary

- ➔ **Value:** A cultural belief concerning a desirable mode of behavior or end-state which guides attitudes, judgments and comparisons.
- ➔ **Principle:** A fundamental truth or doctrine on which rules of conduct are based.
- ➔ **Areas for action:** Complementary aspects of a policy that are separated for the purpose of planning.
- ➔ **Strategy:** An orderly organization of activities for achieving an objective or goal.
- ➔ **Mental health stakeholders:** Persons and organizations with some interest in improving the mental health of a population. They include people with mental disorders, family members, professionals, policy-makers, founders and other interested parties.

What is a Mental Health Action Plan?

➔ A **mental health plan** details the strategies and activities that will be implemented to realize the vision and achieve the objectives of a mental health policy. It also specifies a budget and timeframe for each strategy and activity, as well as





delineates the expected outputs, targets and indicators that can be used to assess whether the implementation of the plan has been successful (see the module "Mental health Policies, Plans and Programmes - updated version", WHO, 2005a).

Why the Policy and Action Plan are Complementary?

- ➔ The mental health policy and plan are interrelated elements needed to improve mental health in a country. While the policy provides the global vision, the plan provides the operational details to make the vision to become a reality.
 - A **policy without strategic plan** remains a dream,
 - A **plan without policy** is an aimless and disorganized list of activities.
- ➔ Countries can have a **specific** mental health policy and plan **or** it can be integrated into a more global health policy and plan.
- ➔ The following diagram illustrates the relationship between the policy and plan:

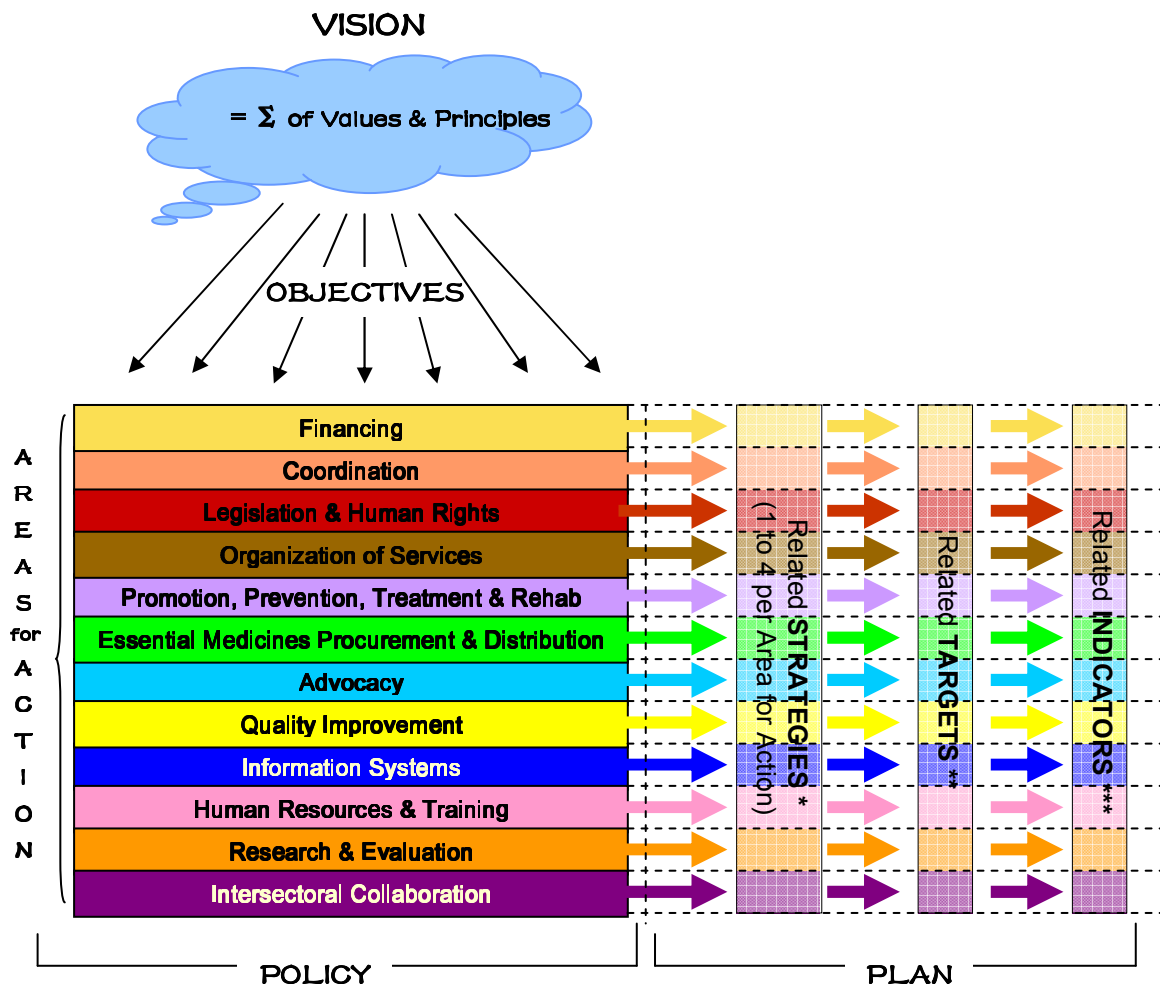


Figure 1: Structure and Relationships between Mental Health Policy and Plan.





WHO Key Recommendations for Developing a Successful Mental Health & Action Plan

Successful policies and plans have usually been developed through an **inclusive process**, where the content follows **best practice principles** and where the policy is clearly defined and **appropriate to local needs and conditions**.

Key elements to consider for the development of a mental health policy and action plan are the following:

- ➔ Policies and action plans must be **informed by data and evidence**:
 - On the **country specific situation**, both in terms of:
 - ~ **mental health needs** and
 - ~ **available resources** (financial & human),
 - On effective strategies, drawing both on the literature and on exchange within the country and with other countries.
- ➔ **Broad stakeholder consultation and negotiation are essential** to ensure a common vision and commitment for implementation of the policy and action plan.

It is fundamental to:

- Listen and understand different stakeholders perspectives,
 - Blend their views to achieve a consensual document that upholds the evidence base for action and ensure all main stakeholders' support to the policy and action plan.
- ➔ **Major roles and responsibilities of different sectors must be clearly identified.**
 - ➔ **Policy objectives, plan strategies and activities for mental health must be prioritized.**
 - ➔ **Strategies, activities, timeframe and budget must be coherent, realistic and designed to meet the priority objectives.**
 - ➔ **Policies and plans must be regularly monitored and evaluated.**

**Mental health policies and action plans must be
CLEAR, CONSENSUAL and REALISTIC.**



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References

- **The WHO Mental Health Policy & Service Development Guidance Package.**
WHO Mental Health Policy and Service Guidance Package (14 modules). url: http://www.who.int/mental_health/policy/en (last accessed: 23/04/2007) :
 - *Mental health policy, plans and programme (updated version)*. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2005 (Mental Health Policy and Service Guidance Package).
 - *Monitoring and Evaluation of Mental Health Policies and Plans*. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2007 (Mental Health Policy and Service Guidance Package).
- **The World Health Report 2001.**
WHO, 2001. The World Health Report 2001. Mental Health: New Understanding, New Hope. Geneva: World Health Organization. 169 pages. url: http://www.who.int/whr/2001/en/whr01_en.pdf (last accessed 23/04/2007).

Useful Links

- To the Mental Health Policy & Service Development Guidance Package webpage: [click here](#)
- The WHO MIND Project brochure: [click here](#)
- For Best Practices examples, a selection of Country Summaries and official documents: [click here](#)

Citations

Mental health policies and action plans. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2007 (http://www.who.int/mental_health/policy/services/en/index.html, accessed 4 September 2007; Mental Health Policy, Planning and Service Development Information Sheet, Sheet1).

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