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05.12.22

Attention: HHS Office of Global Affairs

Re: Virtual Stakeholder Listening Session in preparation for the 75th
World Health Assembly

The Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice (Global Alliance) submits the following comments for consideration during the HHS Office of Global Affairs: Virtual Stakeholder Listening Session in preparation for the 75th World Health Assembly (WHA).

Founded in 1923, the Global Alliance is an interdisciplinary organization with a long history of informing policy, practice, and research concerning behavioral health, social justice, and well-being. We work to reduce disparities in behavioral health and advocate for environments and policies that foster positive mental health and well-being.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, people around the world have been faced with unprecedented challenges. Initially understood through physical illness, the pandemic had a significant impact on health care systems and the workforce around the world. Additionally, the economic impact on individuals and society as well as policies enacted (such as school and workplace closures, stay-at-home orders, and isolation from significant others) have all resulted in a crucial loss of daily routines, learning, and social connectedness. Such changes will continue to have a profound impact on people's lives and well-being. The entirety of the pandemic's impact will not be fully understood for many years. However, what the data do present is clear evidence for why preparedness for future emergencies and disasters must include principles and strategies that center mental health and human rights at every stage. The Global Alliance embeds its work in principles of human rights and social justice and believes centering mental health and well-being equitably across all nations and communities is both necessary for overall individual and population well-being, and pivotal for response to any future emergency. In short, the Global Alliance recommends that mental health and well-being must be centered in an International Public Health Convention on Emergency Preparedness.ⁱ



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In response to the Provisional Agenda for the 75th WHA, the Global Alliance applauds the World Health Assembly for the inclusion of agenda items A75/18 [Strengthening WHO preparedness for and response to health emergencies - Proposal for amendments to the International Health Regulations \(2005\)](#) and A75/19 [Strengthening WHO preparedness for and response to health emergencies - Strengthening collaboration on One Health](#). However, while the Global Alliance appreciates that Strengthening WHO Preparedness is a priority for the international community, there are remaining gaps in the suggested amendments, as mental health and well-being have not been included.

Therefore, the **Global Alliance recommends the instrument must:**

- Be inclusive of mental health and well-being as a core tenet of the convention objectives
- Integrate the principles of human rights into all recommendations
- Include interdisciplinary approaches that are grounded in science
- Incorporate measures of accountability for each nation and its leaders that ensure equitable health promotion and disease prevention.
- Provide tools and resources to nations for emergency preparedness

ⁱ Lomax, S., & Jaffe, G., (2022, February). *Resolution on Centering Mental Health & Well-Being in an International Public Health Convention on Emergency Preparedness*. Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice. [Resolution-MH-WBInclude-PHConv-EmergPrep_FEB2022.pdf \(bhjustice.org\)](#)