



**World Health
Organization**

Western Pacific Region

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Pacific Island countries get down to mental health work

Apia, Western Samoa, 4 June 2007— Plans are to be finalised here this week to better manage mental health problems and address high suicide rates in Pacific Island countries.

In the first meeting of the Pacific Islands Mental Health network (PIMHnet), launched earlier this year by the World Health Organization (WHO) at the Pacific Island Meeting of Health Ministers in Vanuatu, the 16 countries that have joined the network will finalise a 2008 work plan. This includes developing training plans for mental health workers based on an assessment of each country's mental health workforce, drafting a set of mental health guidelines, and collaborating with strategic partners to help provide resources to ensure sustainable services.

Dr Shigeru Omi, WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific, said: "The meeting will be an opportunity for countries to build solid mental health systems based on international best practice, and tailored to each country's individual needs".

Mental health is not high on the health agenda in many Pacific countries, and as a result resources are scarce and services are difficult to access. The PIMHnet model, based on sharing information, experiences and knowledge, will reduce duplication of work and allow limited resources to go further.

Dr Catherine LeGales-Camus, WHO Assistant-Director General in Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health, said "PIMHnet countries share geographic, social, and cultural ties so they are in a good position to work together to promote mental health and address common problems such as high suicide rates and drug and alcohol problems."

The three-year priority areas identified by countries within the network are:

- advocacy for mental health
- human resources and training
- policy, legislation, planning and service development
- research and information
- access to psychotropic medicines.

The countries and areas that have joined PIMHnet are American Samoa, Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Tokelau, Tonga, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu.

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