



**World Health
Organization**

Western Pacific Region

Press Release

Public Information Office

Tel: (63 2) 528 9991

Email: PIO_Unit@wpro.who.int

New efforts to tackle growing mental health problems in the Pacific

Wellington, New Zealand, 22 February 2008—Experts will gather in Wellington, New Zealand, on 25 and 26 February to discuss the alarming mental health situation in the Pacific. The meeting is being convened by the World Health Organization Regional Office for the Western Pacific. It brings together nongovernmental organizations (NGO) from the Pacific region to identify how they can work together to improve the lives of people with mental health problems.

WHO's Regional Director for the Western Pacific, Dr Shigeru Omi, says:

“Building relationships with Pacific island NGOs and other collaborative partners is critical. These organizations provide a significant level of mental health services, but they are isolated from each other and from the formal mental health services that are being provided in countries.”

Strengthening the links between these organizations will significantly reduce duplication and fragmentation of activities in the area of mental health. The meeting will provide a platform for organizations to discuss concrete action they can take to make sure that people are able to access the help they need.

Dr Michelle Funk, coordinator for the work related to mental health policy and service development in WHO Headquarters Geneva, says: “Mental health is not high enough on the health agenda of Pacific countries. Depression, high suicide rates, and drug and alcohol problems are major health and social issues in the majority of Pacific island countries, yet the health services and community support to help people are just not there. NGOs have a critical role to play in helping Pacific Islands Mental Health Network (PIMHnet) member countries raise awareness about mental health issues and helping those in need to get the treatment and care that they require.”

PIMHnet was established in 2005 and now has 17 member countries. 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.

Countries and areas that have joined PIMHnet include American Samoa, Australia, Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Tokelau and Vanuatu.

For more information, please contact:

Dr Michelle Funk, WHO coordinator, Mental Health Policy and Service Development, at +41-22 791 3855 or email: funkm@who.int or Dr Wang Xiangdong, WHO Regional Adviser in Mental Health, at (+632) 528 9858, or e-mail: wangx@wpro.who.int