

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Service Contract for the Review of Belize's Mental Health Act and Drafting of a Revised Mental Health Bill

Technical Guidance: Alondra Izaguirre, National Consultant for NCDs

Timeframe: 21 October 2024 to 28 February 2025

Background:

Mental health is a critical component of overall well-being, yet it remains a significantly underfunded and neglected area of public health globally. Belize, like many developing countries, faces substantial challenges in addressing the mental health needs of its population. In recognition of the evolving global and regional practices, the National Mental Health Policy was updated and launched in 2023. The revision was essential to ensure that it remained in line with current international best practices and aligns with initiatives from the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) Plan of Action on Mental Health 2013-2030. Additionally, the update addresses the ever-growing body of knowledge in the field of mental health, as well as the landscape of mental health needs in Belize.

Globally, mental health disorders affect approximately one billion people, with a disproportionate burden on low- and middle-income countries (World Health Organization, 2022). The economic costs of mental health conditions are immense, affecting individuals, families, and societies. Despite the growing recognition of mental health as a public health priority, access to quality mental health services remains limited in many countries.

In Belize, the limited available data suggests a high burden of mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. These conditions are often fuelled by poverty, inequality, and social determinants of health. It is noteworthy that the current Mental Health Act which was revised in 2000, outdated and misaligned with modern human rights standards, increases these challenges.

The healthcare system in Belize is managed by the Ministry of Health and Wellness. It consists of a network of hospitals, polyclinics, and health centres across the country, divided into four health regions, with only one quasi-government tertiary hospital in the country. The National Health Insurance (NHI) program provides access to primary healthcare services to insured populations, particularly in the Southern, Central and Northern Regions. Despite this structure, the system faces challenges such as limited resources, geographic disparities, and a rising burden of non-communicable diseases. While mental health services are recognized as a priority by the MoHW, this area remains underfunded and understaffed.

To strengthen mental health response in Belize, effective implementation of the [Mental Health Policy](#) requires a comprehensive approach addressing multiple fronts. Updating the Mental Health Act aligns legislation with contemporary mental health practices, ensuring human rights and effective care will contribute to creating a supportive environment, reduce stigma, and provide accessible, quality mental health care for all Belizeans.

Specific objectives of the service contract in Belize:

Objective:

Provide technical guidance to update Belize's Mental Health Act through a country-based participatory approach.

Scope of Services:

- I. Provide technical support to Ministry of Health and Wellness, Government of Belize to draft mental health bill for Belize.
 - a. Review the legislation relating to mental health in Belize.
 - b. Identify gaps in the current mental health act and provide technical advice/recommendations on changes to bring it in line with WHO/global standards and best practices.
 - c. Provide advice on the structure and procedure for the national stakeholder consultations.
 - d. In collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Wellness, identify key stakeholders to participate in the consultations.
 - e. Lead the discussions during the consultations, paying particular attention to proposed key changes to the mental health act.
 - f. Record the inputs from stakeholders during consultations.
 - g. Provide technical guidance to the Ministry of Legal Affairs in the drafting of the mental health bill.
 - h. Submit the draft report on the consultations to the PAHO consultant for NCDs and Mental Health for submission and feedback from the Ministry of Health and Wellness.
 - i. Submit the updated draft mental health bill to the PAHO consultant for NCDs and Mental Health for submission and feedback from the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

Responsibilities of PAHO:

PAHO will be responsible for the following:

- a. Introduce the Contractor to the Technical Advisor for Mental Health at the Ministry of Health and Wellness.
- b. Provide guidance to the Contractor on the available data and tools.
- c. Review and approve draft and final reports and providing feedback to the Contractor in a timely manner.

- d. Provide reference documents to be applied during this assignment.
- e. Coordinate logistics for the consultations and training sessions (venue, training materials etc.)

Qualifications and Experience:

The Service Contractor should possess the following qualifications:

1. Educational background in law, public health law, or related fields, preferably with specialization in mental health policy and legislation.
2. Professional experience in drafting or reviewing public health legislation, with a focus on mental health.
3. Familiarity with international mental health standards such as WHO guidelines and global best practices in mental health legislation.
4. Proven experience in stakeholder engagement and facilitating participatory processes, including public consultations.
5. Excellent analytical and technical writing skills with the ability to translate stakeholder input into legislative recommendations.
6. Knowledge of Belize's healthcare system and legal framework would be considered an asset.

Deliverables:

1. Workplan outlining the schedule of activities to accomplish the deliverables.
2. Summary report on the consultations.
3. First draft revised bill for Mental Health Legislation, which incorporates inputs from the consultations and WHO/global standards and best practices.
4. Final draft revised bill with incorporated feedback from stakeholders.

Payment dates:

- 20% upon receipt of first deliverable on 28 October 2024.
- 30% upon receipt of second deliverable on 13 December 2024.
- 30% upon receipt of third deliverable on 31 January 2025.
- 20% upon receipt of fourth deliverable on 28 February 2025.

Evaluation Criteria:

- Relevant Educational Qualification
- Experience in Legal and Policy Review
- Research, Analytical and Legal Drafting Skills
- Oral and Written Communication
- Financial Proposal