



Department  
for International  
Development



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

James Duddridge MP  
Minister for Africa

Chi Onwurah MP  
Chair, All Party Parliamentary Group for  
Africa,  
c/o The Royal African Society, SOAS  
21 Russel Square  
London, WC1B 5EA

Our ref

205282

25 August 2020

Dear Chi,

Thank you for your letter of 4 August to the Secretary of State on behalf of the APPG for Africa regarding our approach to mental health provision in Africa. I am responding as the Minister for Africa.

We have published our new Approach Paper and Theory of Change on Mental Health and Psychosocial Disability, which can be found on the gov.uk page here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-approach-and-theory-of-change-to-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support>. We have published these externally so both products can be used as global tools in COVID-19 responses.

Secondly, we know COVID-19 and lockdown responses are contributing to social determinants of poor mental health across all areas of life. This goes beyond the traumatic effects of illness and death to, for example, the impact of collapsed livelihoods, over-crowded living conditions, disrupted education, and increased intimate partner violence. Many studies have suggested significant increase in mental ill-health within the general population (for example, a three-fold increase in prevalence of depression in affected areas of Ethiopia). Importantly, as you note, this may then result in a vicious cycle, whereby consequential poor mental health and mental illness, such as depression and anxiety, may in turn lead to poor uptake of public health responses.

We are deeply concerned about the mental health and wellbeing impact of this crisis and is continuing to put the poorest and most marginalised at the heart of our response. Part of the reason for launching our Position Paper and Theory of Change on Mental Health now is so they can act as a global tool in COVID-19 responses. Both these products provide practical advice for those within our department and beyond on how to support those with mental health and psychosocial disabilities and will provide critical guidance in these times. We are also supporting our country offices by providing them direction to the key statistics, impacts and guidance being published on mental health, and providing option to use the Disability Inclusion Helpdesk for targeted evidence needs.

We will continue to support this agenda and advocate for an integrated approach to mental health at the country level. It is critical that governments now make fully integrated

provisions in their COVID-19 responses, given the potentially severe economic and social impact of widespread deterioration of mental health. Actors should follow WHO's lead and guidance on how to develop a fully integrated approach, including: a 'whole of society' approach to protect mental health (ensuring all policy levers foster resilience); availability of emergency mental health and psychosocial support; building mental health provision into COVID-19 recovery plans.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Duddridge". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

**James Duddridge MP**  
**Minister for Africa**