

Position statement

Mental Health and COVID-19

Human Rights in Mental Health-FGIP

Along the highways of the global production chains, Covid-19 has settled in every corner of the world. Global society is experiencing the biggest crisis since the Second World War, a crisis of which we cannot yet estimate the scale of the human, political, economic, social and psychological consequences. The stress surrounding the damage to health, and to personal, employment and social security undermines the psychological well-being of individuals, families, communities and populations. This may lead over time to increasing numbers of deaths of despair as an after-effect of the virus.

The central questions we face today is how to deliver a fair distribution of available health and social care at a time of extremely scarce resources; how to balance the social measures needed for infection control against our essential and basic human rights; and how to do this while minimizing the short and long term economic damage to our lives. These are issues that transcend the purely medical domain. Public debate and political decision-making on this question must lead to a rational, decisive and transparent policy and should contribute to a climate of hope, solidarity, calmness and honesty.

It is not fair in this regard that choices regarding access to and quality of care are determined by arbitrary differences in social circumstances in which people find themselves.

In times of catastrophe there are always vulnerable groups. The nature of these groups varies but people who live in poverty and/or people with a physical or psychosocial disability will invariably become vulnerable. For these groups the privilege of physical distancing often is not within reach.

Regardless of the nature of the emergency, people who are vulnerable because of disability, they, and the staff who provide care, must receive effective protection, both from the virus and from the social and economic consequences of the COVID-19.

The framework of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CPRD) (United Nations 2006) transcends national law and is a key set of guiding principles in the protection of the rights of people with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities.

With regard to the current pandemic the CRPD stipulates that State parties shall:

- Take, in accordance with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters;
- Provide persons with disabilities with the same range, quality and standard of free or affordable health care and programs as provided to other persons, including population-based public health programs;
- Provide those health services needed by persons with disabilities specifically because of their disabilities;
- Require health professionals to provide care of the same quality to persons with disabilities as to others;
- Prevent discriminatory denial of health care or health services or food and fluids on the basis of disability;
- Provide accessible information to persons with disabilities about devices and assistive technologies and forms of assistance, support services and facilities

FGIP call on states to refrain from engaging in any act or practice that is inconsistent with the CPRD in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, and to ensure that public authorities and institutions act in conformity with the Convention and take all appropriate measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination in the framework of the COVID-19 on the basis of disability.