

YOUTH MANIFESTO ON MENTAL HEALTH

This Manifesto is written on behalf of the young volunteers of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. We are demanding visibility, acknowledgement and action.

A Youth Mental Health Crisis

Mental health is one of the most neglected areas of health globally. Millions of young people are affected. Universally, mental health conditions remain significantly under-reported. It is an invisible pandemic unfolding among young people. Choosing not to acknowledge and prioritize this, will result in a humanitarian tragedy. By caring for the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of young people, we fight causes of suffering, and build the capacity of our societies and our current and future volunteers.

The role of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

As the world's biggest humanitarian organization our duty is to alleviate suffering of all kinds. With its local impact and global reach, the Red Cross Red Crescent is uniquely positioned in terms of approaching mental health issues in ways tailored to the communities we serve. Our local staff and volunteers have the ability to meet challenges where they happen, when they happen and contribute to solutions that can build resilient communities.

In recent years, there has been an increasing acknowledgement of the important role that mental health and psychosocial wellbeing plays as a priority for the Red Cross and Red Crescent. The acknowledgement of the 2019 International Conference resolution "*addressing the mental health and psychosocial needs of people affected by armed conflicts, natural disasters and other emergencies*" is a milestone for our movement. Building on the work of the RCRC Moment Group, we are now asking the Red Cross and Red Crescent to commit to taking more action. We need to acknowledge mental health conditions as a stand alone issue of concern and a vulnerability on its own - and as an issue specifically challenging youth.

Designed by, for and with youth

This Manifesto stems from a wide range of the experiences and expertise of young volunteers working and living in different contexts. 5000 young volunteers from 82 countries were involved in shaping the Manifesto. A working group led by the IFRC Youth Commission, with the Danish Red Cross Youth and Kenya Red Cross Youth transformed the thousands of inputs into concrete suggestions for the Red Cross and Red Crescent. Our idea is not to present a full-fledged solution. It is a suggestion for first steps in three areas of action, if the Red Cross and Red Crescent decides to take this matter seriously. Every National Society faces different circumstances and new efforts must take this into account. However, as the world's largest humanitarian organization it is our responsibility to act on all levels. There is no time to waste.



CONTRIBUTIONS FROM 82 COUNTRIES



RECOMMENDATIONS



BREAK THE STIGMA

1

The challenges experienced by young volunteers are:

- The stigma and discrimination that young people experience regarding talking about mental health concerns and in accessing appropriate mental health and psychosocial support services.
- The young volunteers considered stigma and discrimination as a top issue regarding young people's mental health. The mental health challenges go beyond stigma and are often considered especially complex and difficult to grasp. Nevertheless, one thing is for sure: If we cannot talk about it, we cannot solve it.

We call on the Red Cross and Red Crescent to:

- Recognize the worsening status of young people's mental health as a potential humanitarian tragedy and utilize its size, strength and unique reputation by committing to take lead in putting mental health on the agenda on a global, national and local level.
- Commit to prioritize the mental health of our own volunteers, taking care of those, who are taking care of others. Our own leadership needs to initiate and create safe spaces for the conversations to happen within the Red Cross and Red Crescent - if we do not allow these dialogues, we are contributing to the stigma.
- Create a toolkit that aims to equip National Societies with the skills to integrate mental health and psychosocial support as a key priority in their work.

WIDENING OUR APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH

2

The challenges experienced by young volunteers are:

- Youth's limited access to the right support when needed.
- The young volunteers mention the need for mental health activities, that are not strictly linked to a crisis, as an important tool for the RCRC to use.

We call on the Red Cross and Red Crescent to:

- Proactively recognize and respond to mental health and psychosocial support needs both before, during and after a crisis. Not only an immediate response is needed, but we also need to develop, promote and share already existing tools to use an integrative approach to address the complex health and social welfare issue.
- To link and integrate networks within the Red Cross and Red Crescent in communities focusing on mental health, and with the purpose of contextualizing tools and methods to fit national and local circumstances.

YOUTH AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

3

The challenges experienced by young volunteers are:

- Lack of opportunity and an enabling environment for young people to act on the mental health challenges facing themselves and their peers.
- The lack of youth participation in both governance and programming stands in the way of adequate response when dealing with topics, where youth is a vulnerable target group.

We call on the Red Cross and Red Crescent to:

- Train young mental health ambassadors who can advise and support in all national societies.
- Support youth in developing and leading necessary solutions by supporting already existing youth-to-youth approaches and the development of new methods on the subject. Aiming to enable young people to recognize and cope with both their own and others' mental health challenges.
- Mainstream a Mental Health and psychosocial support component into all current and future youth-programs.