

## **71<sup>st</sup> Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean**

**Doha, Qatar, 14–17 October 2024**

### **Agenda item 3c – Regional action plan for mental health and psychosocial support in emergencies, including substance use (2024–2030)**

The International Council of Nurses (ICN), representing over 28 million nurses worldwide, highlights the importance of the Regional Action Plan for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) in Emergencies (2024–2030). This plan provides guidance to Member States on preparing for and addressing MHPSS needs, contributing to stronger communities and more resilient health and social care systems. However, a significant shortage of financial and human resources in the region limits access to these services. The action plan also notes that many countries facing emergencies lack effective policies and strategies for MHPSS workforce attraction, development, retention, and empowerment. ICN stresses that having an adequately trained nursing workforce, including mental health nurses, is critical to delivering people-centred, rights-based care.

To enhance MHPSS services and workforce development, ICN recommends the following strategic actions aligned with the Regional Action Plan:

#### **1. Strengthening Nurses' Role in Mental Health Care**

As the largest sector of the health workforce, nurses are essential to mental health care. ICN believes that all nurses, regardless of their specialty, are responsible for promoting mental well-being and delivering essential services to those with mental health conditions. ICN calls for integrating mental health education into all nursing curricula, ensuring that nurses acquire the skills to identify and address mental health issues in various care settings, especially in primary health care and community-based environments.

#### **2. Investing in the Mental Health Nursing Workforce**

ICN advocates for increased investment in mental health nurses, particularly in the expansion of advanced practice mental health nurses (APMHNs). These

professionals have the clinical expertise and leadership skills to manage the growing mental health burden. A well-supported mental health nursing workforce is key to closing treatment gaps and achieving the goals outlined in the Regional Action Plan.

### **3. Promoting Community-Based, People-Centred Care**

ICN supports the continued shift toward community-based mental health services. Nurses, particularly in rural and underserved areas, are often the first point of contact for those with mental health issues and are well-positioned to identify and manage priority mental health and substance use conditions in community-based settings. Scaling up community mental health services, supported by multidisciplinary teams that include nurses, is critical to providing accessible, holistic care. Additionally, ICN emphasizes involving individuals with lived experiences and their families in designing and delivering mental health services to ensure care meets their needs.

### **4. Combating Stigma and Discrimination**

Stigma remains a major barrier to accessing mental health services. ICN advocates for embedding evidence-based stigma reduction strategies into nursing education and public health initiatives. By equipping nurses with the tools to address stigma, we can foster more inclusive environments for individuals with mental health conditions.

### **5. Adopting the ICN Guidelines on Mental Health Nursing**

ICN urges Member States to adopt and implement its Guidelines on Mental Health Nursing. These guidelines provide a comprehensive framework for mental health nursing education, practice, and regulation. They emphasize the need for consistent, high-quality mental health care and advocate for policies that support mental health nurses. By adopting these guidelines, Member States will equip their nursing workforce with the skills necessary to deliver holistic, person-centred mental health care and promote mental well-being across communities.

ICN invites Member States to leverage our resources, insights and expertise, particularly with the lens of our recent report, to bolster mental health nursing in the region.