



Mental Health Advocacy
Youth Mental Health

Service User Empowerment
Leadership Training

Building Resilience
Policy & Services Research

Mental Health Reforms
Promoting Emotional Wellbeing

MEMORANDUM OF THE ASIDO FOUNDATION ON A BILL FOR AN ACT TO PROVIDE FOR THE ENHANCEMENT AND REGULATION OF MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES, PROTECT PERSONS WITH MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS, AND ESTABLISHMENT OF NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR MENTAL AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES FOR THE EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH IN NIGERIA AND FOR OTHER RELATED MATTERS.

Purpose: The purpose of this memorandum is to intimate the esteemed Senate Committee about the activities of the Asido Foundation and make recommendations into the draft Bill.

Mental Health Facts:

- 1 in every 4 persons will suffer from a mental disorder in their lifetime (WHO statistics)
- Thus, 50 million Nigerians may suffer from a mental disorder at some point in their lifetime.
- 1 in every 10 persons at any point in time, may be suffering from a mental disorder (WHO Statistics)
- Thus 20 million Nigerians may be suffering from one form of mental disorder or the other at any point in time
- Mental illnesses are disorders of the brain; they are treatable – just like physical illnesses
- Only 2 out of every 10 Nigerians with a mental health problem is able to access the care they need, thus, accounting for a treatment gap of 80%. (WHO World Mental Health Surveys).
- Ignorance, shame, stigma and superstitious beliefs around mental illness prevent people from accessing the care they need, from health facilities.
- There are several human rights abuses, including chaining, beating and deprivation of food and water in several tradi-spiritual homes – as supported by the police rescue of hundreds recently in Kaduna and Ibadan; as well as the recent but damning Human Rights Watch release about the quality of mental health services in Nigeria.

Challenges: Against this backdrop of misconceptions and ignorance around mental illness, it is unfortunate but not surprising that human rights abuses, stigma and discrimination and untold suffering for affected persons and their families are the norm. The reality is that mental disorders are a result of abnormalities of the brain that can affect any and everybody, and across the lifespan: from children (eg autism) to adolescents (drug abuse, depression, psychosis), through adulthood (depression, bipolar disorder etc), and eventually to senior citizens (e.g dementia). It is no respecter of race, religious creed, educational or physical attainment.

Asido Foundation: Mental health advocacy, promoting empathy, facilitating recovery

About the Asido Foundation: The Asido Foundation is a not-for-profit charity organization that seeks to counter the ocean of ignorance around mental health by providing evidence – based information, and engaging in advocacy and intervention activities aimed at improving the mental health needs of the Nigerian population. It is registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC).

The Founder, Dr Jibril Abdulmalik, a Psychiatrist, has been writing weekly articles to promote mental health awareness in the Nigerian Tribune on Thursdays since 2016. The column is titled “Your Mental Health & You”. But this has only succeeded in exposing the magnitude of the need for effective public mental health awareness campaigns. This is where the **Asido Foundation** comes in: to harness resources (human and material), for a more effective and impactful campaign. A book has been published, to advance these objectives, and is the compilation of the weekly articles, arranged according to common themes. The book is titled “Optimal Mental Health: An Everyday Guide”.

We are committed to working with all stakeholders, especially the Senate and House Committees on Health, Federal and State Ministries of Health, Service Users and their families, Media Practitioners, Schools and every interested citizen for the actualization of our vision and mission.

PRAYER(S)

a) The Esteemed Senate Committee on Health, is invited to note:

That the Asido Foundation activities have been across eight major domains of:

i) Mental Health Advocacy ii) Service User Empowerment iii) Building Resilience iv) Mental Health Reforms v) Youth Mental Health vi) Leadership Training vii) Policy & Services Research viii) Promoting Emotional Wellbeing

- In this regard, we have conducted book launches in Ibadan, Lagos and Abuja between September and November 2019.
- We regularly on a weekly basis carry out awareness and advocacy campaigns using our social media handles.
- We organized a Campus Awareness Walk Against Suicide at the University of Ibadan, on the 10th September 2019, to mark the World Suicide Prevention Day.
- We organize and host a monthly Interactive Monthly Community Engagement (IMCE) on our Telegram Page to educate the public around mental health issues
- Service User Empowerment: We organized an Asido Symposium on Service User Perspectives of Mental Health Services in Nigeria at the last Association of Psychiatrists in Nigeria (APN) Conference, on the 26th November 2019 in Port Harcourt.
- We have established and officially registered a student led *Asido Campus Network* to promote peer to peer support and early identification with the University of Ibadan as the pilot. We aim to subsequently replicate and spread it across all campuses in Nigeria.

The **Asido Foundation** envisions a Nigerian society in which all persons will enjoy optimal mental health regardless of age, gender, socio-economic status, religious creed or ethnicity.

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b) Include in this Bill:

1. In line with the mandate of the Asido Foundation, to promote mental health advocacy and reforms with a view to improving awareness, reducing stigma and discrimination and empowering persons with mental disorders and their families; we are dissatisfied that there is no explicit requirement of the Mental Health Commission to engage in public awareness campaigns.

We reiterate that so long as ignorance, superstitious beliefs and stigma continue to be associated with mental illness in our society, they will remain serious barriers to service utilization and we will continue to suffer from families taking their loved ones with a mental health problem to prayer houses and other places where they are more likely to be abused.

Our prayer therefore, is that a specific and explicit function should be added, under Section 5 (functions of the Mental Health Commission) which should specify that:

It will carry out public awareness campaigns to promote better community understanding of mental illness, promote service utilization and reduce stigma and discrimination.

2. We propose that the terminology of “**Allied Mental Health Professionals**” should be edited to read “Mental Health Professionals”.....and they should all be listed by professional description as ‘Psychiatrists, Clinical Psychologists, Psychiatric Nurses, Medical Social Workers, Occupational therapists etc’.



Dr Jibril O. Abdulmalik

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**Founder, Chief Executive Officer,
Asido Foundation.**

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