

HE Muhammadu Buhari,
President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria,
Aso Rock Presidential Villa,
Abuja, Nigeria.

5th of October, 2022

Distinguished Senator Ahmad Lawan, CON,
President of the Senate of Nigeria,
National Assembly Complex,
Abuja, Nigeria.

Rt. Hon. Femi Gbajabiamila,
Speaker of the House of Representatives,
National Assembly Complex,
Abuja, Nigeria.

Your Excellencies,

Assent to Nigeria's National Mental Health Bill 2020

Nigeria should adopt a new mental health legal framework by passing the National Mental Health Bill 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic ushered in not only a public health emergency but also a crisis impacting Nigerian minds. The Lancet Commission on Global Mental Health and Sustainable Development warns of increased psychological vulnerability stating that “many people who previously coped well, are now less able to cope because of the multiple stressors generated by the pandemic.” Given these uncertainties, a recent United Nations report indicates that many use addictive coping strategies, including alcohol, drugs, tobacco, and online gaming.

Studies have confirmed the harmful psychosocial effect of the pandemic in Nigeria. A **national survey** on the impact of COVID-19 on mental health by Mentally Aware Nigeria Initiative (MANI), a Nigerian Mental Health member, in partnership with the Africa Polling Institute, found that:

- Close to one-fourth (23.7%) of the respondents had a score of 3 or above on the Patient Health Questionnaire-2 and Generalized Anxiety Disorder-2 assessment, indicating that they may have problems with depression or anxiety, and need to be investigated further;
- Most respondents (71.5%) also had medium stress scores on a Perceived Stress Scale assessment.

Nigeria’s legal architecture is inadequate to address these challenges and worsens the crisis. **The nation’s current mental health law, the Lunacy Act of 1958, is a British colonial holdover that predates the country’s independence.** According to Human Rights Watch, among other things, it empowers medical practitioners and magistrates to detain individuals with mental health conditions without providing medical or therapeutic treatment. It also allows the chaining and shackling of patients against their will. People spend years in institutions – sometimes decades – because Nigeria lacks adequate

services to support them in their various communities. This legislation is outdated and inhumane.

After repeated failed attempts at legislative reform in 2003 and 2013, the National Assembly passed the National Mental Health Bill 2020. It has been awaiting transmission to and concurrence from the Presidency since July 2021. Some provisions of the new law include establishing a Mental Health Services Department and Fund, human rights protections, and community-based coverage for those with mental health conditions.

An updated mental health law is a critical investment for Nigeria, especially during COVID-19, as it ensures that those in need receive compassionate and high-quality care. It will also signal our leadership in this arena that can bring other critical investments, partnerships, and opportunities from the global arena. World Health Organization research found that of the one in eight Nigerians that develop a mental health condition during their lifetime, fewer than 10% have access to the care they need. Please support Nigerians to lead rich and fulfilling lives — there is no health without mental health; it is core to our humanity. **After more than 65 years of regulatory inaction in the field, Nigeria should pass the National Mental Health Bill 2020. Its delayed execution means continued denial of adequate and quality care for persons suffering psychologically.**

Many support this change. Over 1,000 concerned individuals have signed a [petition](#) requesting the President to pass this critical reform. We look forward to supporting the Federal Republic of Nigeria in enacting and implementing this vital legislation. We will follow up with your Office, but should the need arise, please contact us kindly via email at NigerianMentalHealth@gmail.com or by phone at +2348186594160.

About

Nigerian Mental Health is a global community of mental health practitioners and organizations actively leading efforts to improve psychosocial well-being. Founded in 2019, its mission is to bring about transformational and sustainable change in Nigeria's mental health landscape.

Signed the undersigned,



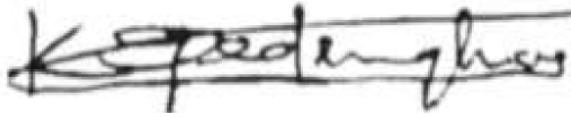
Chime Asonye, J.D.
Founder, Nigerian Mental Health



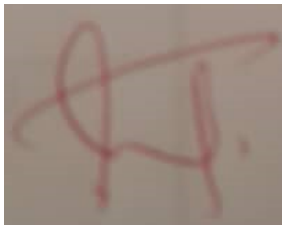
Prof. Taiwo James Obindo, *M.B.Ch.B.(Ife); FWACP (Psychiatry)*
President, Association of Psychiatrists in Nigeria (APN)



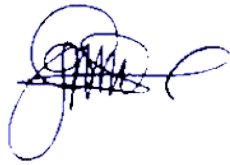
Prof. Gboyega Emmanuel Abikoye, PhD, FNPA, FNACP
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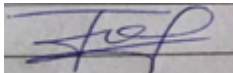
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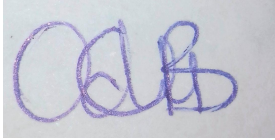
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Executive Director, SBO Initiative

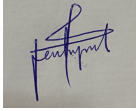
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Lucy Enangha Abeng
Founder, Mental Health for Youth Initiative



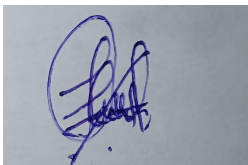
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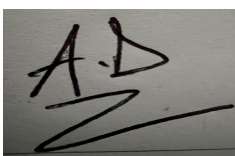
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Onyedikachi Ekwerike, Ph.D.
Founder, Postpartum Support Network Africa



Jecinta Egbim
Founder, Friends Advocating For Mental Health Initiative



Timothy Asobele Emmanuel Dare
Founder, Anti Suicide and Depression Squad (ASADS)



Vanessa Adebayo
Founder, Africa's Mental Health Matters



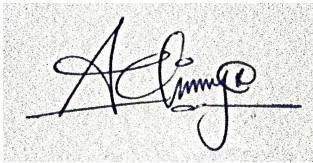
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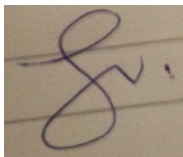
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