



## Introduction

In response to the global movement towards effective community based mental health services, many countries in the Asia-Pacific have begun to establish mental health policies and guidelines reflective of this change. In 2005, the Asia-Pacific Community Mental Health Development (APCMHD) Project was initiated to support countries in the region to facilitate and implement locally appropriate models or approaches to community mental health service delivery in the Asia-Pacific. The project is based on the work of an emerging network of mental health reformers, working to build culturally appropriate mental health policy frameworks and workforce in the region. Initiated in collaboration with the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office, the APCMHD project is led by Asia-Australia Mental Health, a consortium of the University of Melbourne (Department of Psychiatry and Asialink), and St. Vincent's Health.

The APCMHD project aims to illustrate and promote best practice in mental health care in the community through use of information exchange, current evidence and practical experience in the region. The project, which brought many key mental health bodies to work collaboratively, is consistent with the WHO Global Action Programme for Mental Health.

A key outcome is a collection of exemplary community mental health models and key guiding principles for development of services in the region. In 2008, a report summarising the work of the project's first stage was published, documenting the development of community mental health services in each participating country or region. Written by the region's mental health leaders, the unique document also contains country-specific examples of best practice. The Summary Report of the APCMHD Project and the Full Country Report can be found on the website: [www.aamh.edu.au](http://www.aamh.edu.au)

The project has received international recognition, published in a number of international journals and newsletters and is featured on the front page of the World Psychiatric Association website <http://www.wpanet.org/>

The APCMHD project report highlighted that all countries/ regions involved in the project were:

- Grappling with the issue of a rising health burden of mental illness
- Facing markedly under-resourced trained professional mental health workforce.
- Extending the reach of service outside the stand alone mental hospital
- Developing partnerships that include arrangements with existing community resources, consumer and carers groups, primary health carers, volunteers, academia, government departments, community groups, religious organisations and the corporate sector.

In summary, without the development of sustainable partnerships, faced with the growing epidemic of mental illness, mental health professionals can only deliver limited services. At the APCMHD Project Meeting held in Prague in September 2008 (in conjunction with the World Congress of Psychiatry), it was agreed that the project would continue to explore and share ideas, progress and challenges in developing community mental health services. The network agreed therefore that a priority for Stage Two of the project is a focus on providing support for the creation and maintenance of effective partnerships in the community for mental health service delivery.

Forty-eight delegates from sixteen participating Asia Pacific countries (see [Appendix 1](#)) came together to start the next stage of the Asia Pacific Community Mental Health Development Project. The meeting on the 1<sup>st</sup> day opened with a keynote lecture by Professor Graham Thornicroft from the UK who also offered expert commentary (see [Appendix 2](#)). Countries and states represented were Vietnam, Thailand, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Mongolia, Federated States of Micronesia, Malaysia, Laos, Korea, Japan, Indonesia, China, Cambodia, and Australia. A rich array of country exemplars of best practice in community mental health partnerships was delivered (See country presentations in [Appendix 3](#)).

The workshop on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day was expertly facilitated by Dr Margaret Byrne who discussed conversation guidelines: proposing and gaining agreement for participants to listen to each other; respect opinions, suspend judgements and remain open; and to contribute actively (For the lectures see [Appendix 4](#)). The day was structured to encourage active group participation and to ensure that delegates mixed and mingled. New participants met previous participants, delegates from different countries learnt about the particular dilemmas faced by each country. As the day progressed, a common commitment to developing community mental health services cemented the partnership of the different countries and region: there was more unanimity than difference (See participants' posters in [Appendix 5](#)). Finally, a firm base was built on which to launch the Stage Two of the Project: Strengthening Partnerships for Community Mental Health.

## **Overall purpose of the APCMHD Network**

**To build a supportive network of mental health leadership across the Asia-Pacific countries whose activities contribute to improving community mental health for the region.**