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USAID's Mental Health FRAMEWORK

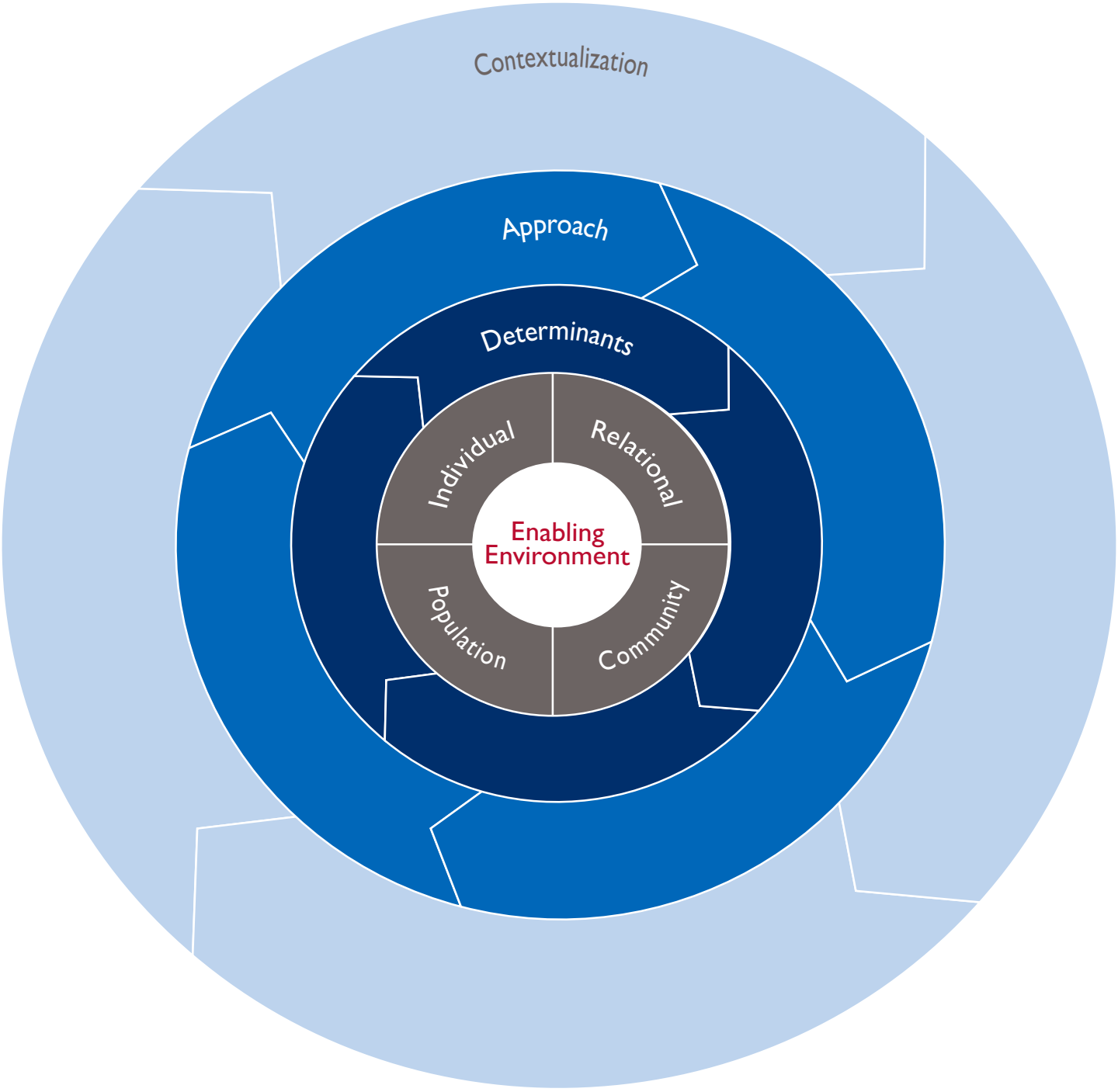
Introduction

Mental health encompasses emotional, cognitive, psychological, and social well-being, and people may conceptualize it differently based on their culture and other factors. As with physical health, mental health is complex. Even at the same time, people can experience the various parts of mental health differently. Multiple determinants, including culture, biological factors, and social and environmental conditions, influence mental health. A person's mental health can change, sometimes suddenly, because of conflict, violence, loss, and other stressful life events. Mental health impacts all aspects of life, including engagement with family, friends, education, and employment. It also influences physical health, including morbidity and mortality.

USAID's 2024 Mental Health Position Paper emphasizes that mental health is integral to well-being, including physical health, child development, educational outcomes, and workforce participation.[1] Evidence shows that mental health conditions are prevalent across the globe, including in high-income countries. Populations exposed to extreme poverty, conflict, food insecurity, community violence, stigma, and other potentially traumatic events often experience even higher rates of mental health issues. These factors, compounded by factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic and other global challenges, have intensified mental health challenges and conditions and made it clear that mental health is crucial for achieving development objectives across sectors.

The determinants of mental health are multifaceted and operate at various social levels: population, community, relational, and individual. Creating a strong enabling environment for mental health involves integrating policies, resources, and societal attitudes that support individual well-being. This environment integrates human rights considerations, ensures services are culturally sensitive and contextually relevant, and upholds individual dignity. Creating an enabling environment necessitates dismantling stigma, promoting mental health literacy, and integrating mental health into broader health and development agendas. Collaboration among governments, NGOs, healthcare providers, and communities is essential to foster collective commitment and action.

Overview: Mental Health Framework



USAID's Mental Health Framework illustrates how context, determinants, and supports influence the mental health and well-being of populations. USAID's main goal is to support populations, communities, families, and individuals by promoting strong enabling environments. Promoting these enabling environments is depicted at the center of the sunburst graphic, a data visualization tool used to represent how different aspects of mental health are related and contribute to the whole.

The framework represents approaches to address the determinants of mental health at various levels of society. The middle circles of the sunburst chart provide examples of the various levels, determinants, approaches, and contexts involved in mental health prevention, support, and response but do not encompass all possible issues, approaches, or strategies. The critical importance of contextualizing prevention, support, and response approaches in full partnership with local communities is represented by its placement on the outermost circle, encompassing all other aspects.

Center: Enabling Environment[2]

Definition: An enabling environment is a setting or context that promotes and supports mental health by addressing determinants and providing necessary resources, support, protection, and infrastructure. To address the complex nature of mental health across the human lifespan, an effective enabling environment should include a variety of individual, relational, community, and population-level factors.

Aspects of enabling environments that impact mental health include supportive policies, community programs that promote mental well-being, prevention programs that address determinants, integration of mental health services into primary healthcare or other service settings (e.g., employment, education), and direct services, such as psychotherapy.

Ring 1: Level Within Society[3]

Definition: The levels of approaches refer to the different societal levels at which interventions, programs, policies, and services are designed and implemented to prevent, support, and respond to mental health challenges and conditions. Each level targets specific groups and contexts, from broad societal impacts to individual support mechanisms. These levels are:

- **Population:** This level focuses on approaches, including programs, interventions, services, systems, and policies that impact entire populations. It aims to improve overall mental health outcomes by addressing societal factors and implementing large-scale initiatives.
- **Community:** This level addresses mental health systems, policies, and interventions in communities, including, but not limited to, the availability, type, quality, and equity of programs, services and resources support.
- **Relational:** This level targets the dynamics within relationships, such as those between family members, friends, and colleagues, which can significantly influence mental health. This includes direct support of programs, interventions, services policies, and other approaches designed to impact people at the relationship level.
- **Individual:** This level focuses on approaches directly impacting individuals, aiming to address personal mental health needs and challenges.

Ring 2: Determinants[4]

Definition: Determinants of mental health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age that can have an impact–positive or negative–on various aspects of mental health and can increase or decrease the chances of experiencing mental health challenges. Examples include socioeconomic factors, genetic influences, physical health, life experiences, educational opportunities, physical environments, social support networks, and access to mental health services.

Impact on Mental Health: Determinants influence mental health in complex ways. For instance, poverty, lack of education, and exposure to violence can increase the chances of experiencing mental health challenges. Conversely, strong social support networks and access to quality education can decrease the chances of experiencing mental health challenges.

Ring 3: Approach[5]

> The intentional integration of mental health considerations into programming increases positive impacts on sector-specific development outcomes of interest.

Prevention: Preventative approaches aim to decrease the chances of future mental health conditions and challenges within the general population or among individuals exposed to determinants known to increase the chances of developing related conditions or challenges.[6,7] These include but are not limited to emergency preparedness, stigma reduction campaigns, workplace regulations, violence prevention programs and outreach, peer-led school initiatives, and culturally relevant coping strategies.

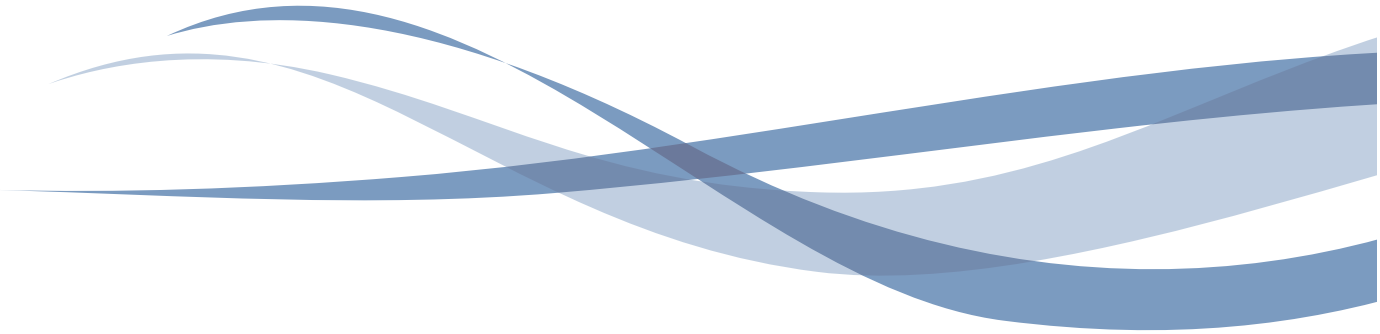
Supporting Elements:[8] Supporting Elements aim to strengthen systems and increase social determinants that foster mental, cognitive, and psychosocial well-being and set up the conditions that allow individuals to lead healthy, dignified lives free of discrimination, stigma, and abuse. These elements include but are not limited to early intervention social and public service programs, housing and food security services, equitable compensation for all people in the society, safety planning (i.e., population, community, individual), increased access to green spaces, community support groups, medical care, and social assistance programs.

Response: Response refers to approaches aimed at improving mental health outcomes, addressing mental health challenges and conditions, and providing ongoing support. These responses include, but are not limited to, improving access to legal support and justice services, promoting legislation that requires care coordination, expanding access to care, and case management.[9]

Ring 4: Contextualization[10]

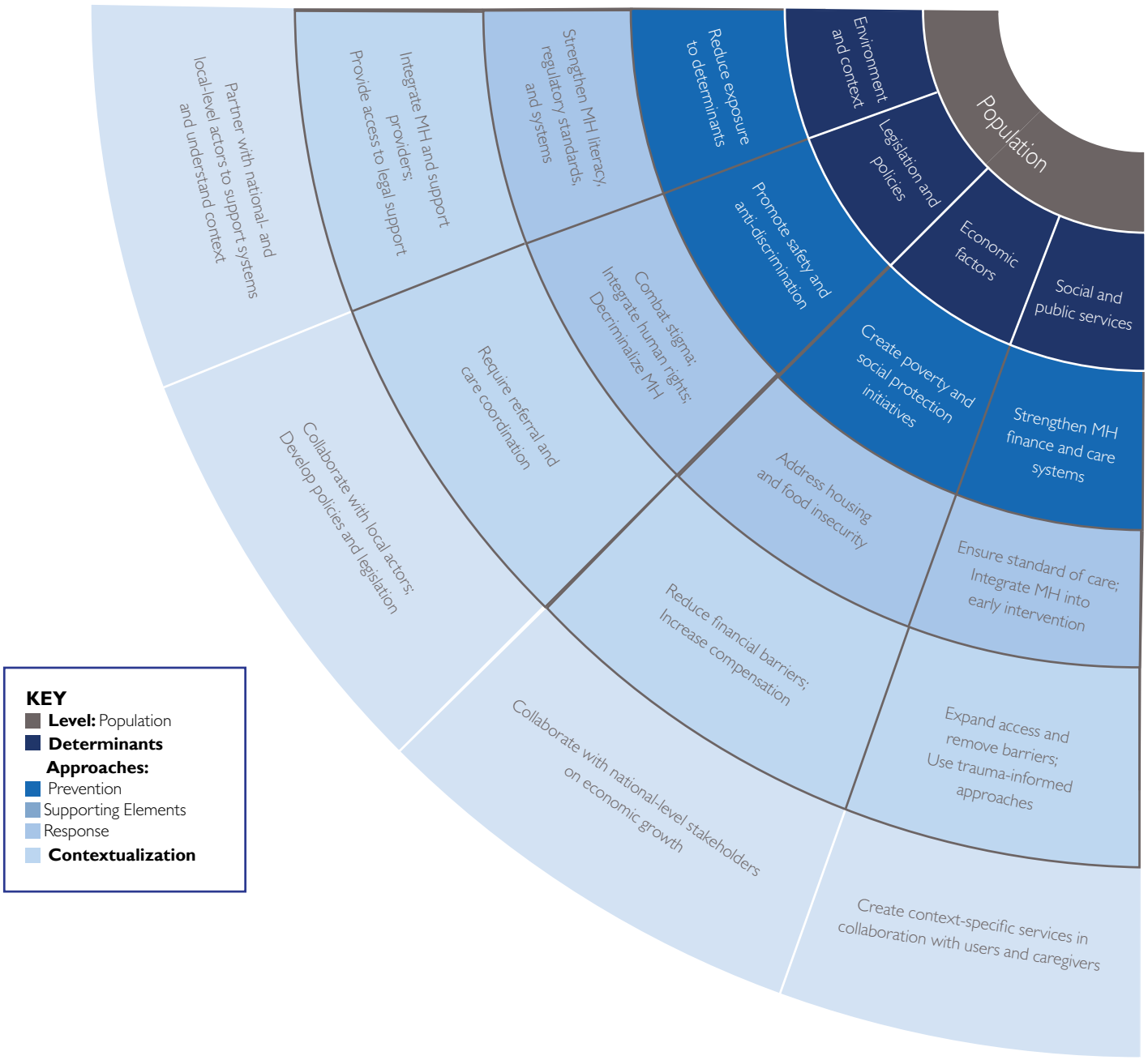
Contextualizing global mental health programs, interventions, services, policies, and other approaches involves ensuring that approaches fit different regions and communities' unique cultural, social, economic, and environmental contexts. This process aligns with the principles of locally-led development.[11] Contextualization acknowledges the diverse conceptualizations of mental health across cultures. It involves building and diversifying the evidence base to include locally supported approaches, fostering collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including people with mental health issues and community mental health experts, and adhering to best practices for ensuring cultural fit.[12]

Evidence briefs that informed the development of the USAID Mental Health Framework can be found here: https://www.usaid.gov/inclusivedevelopment/mental-health/mental-health-position-paper



Population Level

Population-level approaches focus on aspects of the enabling environment that impact entire populations by addressing societal factors. This level includes improving legislation, policies, and economic conditions and strengthening social and public services across healthcare, education, housing, transportation, and social welfare sectors. These efforts aim to increase the availability, quality, and equity of essential services, ensuring they are well-funded, staffed, and maintained to meet the needs of all individuals within the population.



Population Level

Population Level

Determinant: Environment and context[13]

Aspects of the context and environment influence the mental health status of the population. These factors relate directly to the situations people are exposed to, such as, but not limited to, the level of violence and conflict, social cohesion, frequency of extreme weather events, health of the physical environment, inequality, cultural attitudes toward people with mental health challenges (e.g., stigma, discrimination, cultural norms regarding types of support, etc.), and access to education and healthcare.

Approach:

P **Prevention:** Population-level preventative approaches include addressing structural and systems factors contributing to determinant exposure; launching violence and conflict prevention initiatives; creating mental health stigma reduction or healthy behavior campaigns; designing social safety net and healthcare access programs; developing emergency preparedness, climate change, and safety initiatives; bolstering efforts to increase social cohesion; strengthening economic systems; and implementing urban and infrastructure planning that encourages social support or addresses mental health needs; and integrating prevention programs into education, workplace, and other systems.

S **Supporting elements:** Population-level supporting elements include implementing mental health literacy campaigns (e.g., addressing situational needs, anti-stigma messaging, culturally aligned education about mental health symptoms, applying culturally relevant coping skills); strengthening and professionalizing the mental health workforce; increasing access to green spaces; establishing regulatory and ethical standards and accountability systems; creating mental health human rights legislation and policies; funding that equalizes levels for mental and physical health; advocating for legislation that decriminalizes mental health (including suicide); reducing access to harmful and dangerous chemicals; and developing of standards of care with accountability.

R **Response:** Population-level response approaches include working with national and local governments and other stakeholders at the population or systems level to integrate mental health support across various systems and sectors, approaches that increase the capacity to provide proactive support during and following emergencies and other potentially traumatizing events (e.g., conflict and crisis, climate, and other emergencies) to include support for mental health providers and staff and national and local-level initiatives that increase access to legal support and justice services.

See additional examples in the annex tables on page 30.

Contextualization:

- Collaborate with national-level stakeholders to understand the most relevant population-level factors.
- Partner with members of marginalized groups to address their specific mental health needs.
- Collaborate with national and international crisis response teams to ensure that mental health integration is driven by and responsive to local needs, cultural and contextual factors, and local definitions and concepts related to mental health.
- Form collaborative, systems-level partnerships and linkages to ensure that local needs, expertise, and contextual factors (including social norms and culture) are integrated into and drive all stages of policy and service development.

2 Population Level

Determinant: Legislation and policies

Government policies, regulations, and laws related to the rights of persons with mental health issues, mental health services, social welfare, employment, housing, and education can impact the mental health of a population. Effective policies that prioritize mental health and provide adequate support can lead to better outcomes, while neglectful or discriminatory policies can exacerbate mental health challenges.

Approach:

P **Prevention:** Population-level legislative and policy approaches to prevention include revising policies and regulations to reduce discrimination and exclusion, in general and towards people with mental health challenges; educating policymakers on mental health issues; improving digital safety (e.g., reducing cyberbullying, address technology-facilitated gender-based violence, harms related to social media use by teens); promoting supportive workplace regulations (e.g., workplace mental health and well-being programs); and addressing social determinants through policies and regulations that promote safe and secure environments.

S **Supporting elements:** Population-level supporting elements include increasing basic and applied mental health research funding; establishing regulatory and ethical standards, such as those related to reducing coercive mental health treatment; decriminalizing mental health and reducing stigma, including for suicide; supporting the deinstitutionalization of those with mental health challenges; professionalizing mental health providers; encouraging strong privacy and confidentiality practices, review boards, and accountability systems for service providers; integrating mental health considerations into other types of policies (e.g., education, healthcare, justice systems); strengthening the integration of human rights considerations related to mental health; and providing multisectoral training on mental health (e.g., law enforcement to recognize and respond appropriately to mental health crises).

R **Response:** Population-level response approaches include establishing and strengthening standards of care, practice, and service user rights codes, and reporting mechanisms; promoting legislation that requires or establishes care coordination, referral mechanisms, and emergency response standards of practice related to mental health; and promoting legislation that increases access to justice for people with mental health challenges.

See additional examples in the annex tables on page 30.

Contextualization:

- Collaborate with national-level stakeholders working on legislation, policy, and regulations related to mental health.
- Collaborate with national-level stakeholders to improve the responsiveness of policies and legislation to community mental health needs; reinforce individual decision-making autonomy; and increase interjurisdictional relationships and collaboration on mental health.
- Advocate for policies that promote social inclusion, especially for the most marginalized populations, and encourage continued inclusion and collaboration during implementation.
- Work with pre-existing systems at the local level with respect for cultural, religious, and linguistic needs and perspectives.
- Collaborate with local experts, persons who have or have had mental health challenges, and other stakeholders to deliver and adapt programming.

3 Population Level

Determinant: Economic factors[15]

Factors, such as living wage requirements, types of safety net programs available, level of income equality, access to healthcare and housing, and availability of high-quality education, can profoundly impact the mental health of populations. Addressing systemic issues like poverty can decrease the prevalence of mental health challenges, improve economic conditions more broadly, and decrease the cost of mental health services.[16]

Approach:

P **Prevention:** Population-level approaches to address economic factors related to mental health include reducing poverty; improving social protection; increasing access to physical and mental health services, especially preventative care to support engagement in the workplace; and encouraging the integration of mental health into livelihood initiatives.

S **Supporting elements:** Population-level supporting elements related to economic factors include addressing housing and food insecurity; building on existing community assets and strengths; and ensuring equitable compensation for marginalized groups.

R **Response:** Population-level approaches to address economic factors include supporting career and education programs; increasing compensation for the mental health workforce; reducing financial barriers to mental health services; preserving decision-making autonomy and choices for individuals with mental health challenges that have lower incomes; and increasing the flexibility of services by addressing barriers such as childcare, perceived stigma, long waiting times, and provider availability.

See additional examples in the annex tables on page 31.

Contextualization

- Collaborate with national-level stakeholders to ensure equitable resource allocation and reach underserved populations.
- Collaborate with national-level stakeholders working on economic growth and related efforts.

4 Population Level

Determinant: Social and public services

The availability of high-quality social and public services significantly impacts populations' mental and physical health. Most often, the availability and quality of services are determined at the population or systems level through government funding, regulations, policies, and programs. Even when communities serve as the primary access point for administering, funding, and designing local systems, population-level factors have a significant impact. For instance, communities often depend on national funds for basic financial support and may be constrained or discouraged from expanding local services based on national policies and other influencing factors.

Approach

P **Prevention:** Population-level prevention approaches can include strengthening financial systems for social and public services, strengthening mental health systems, integrating prevention initiatives into existing social and public services, and establishing comprehensive funding structures to make social and public services more sustainable.

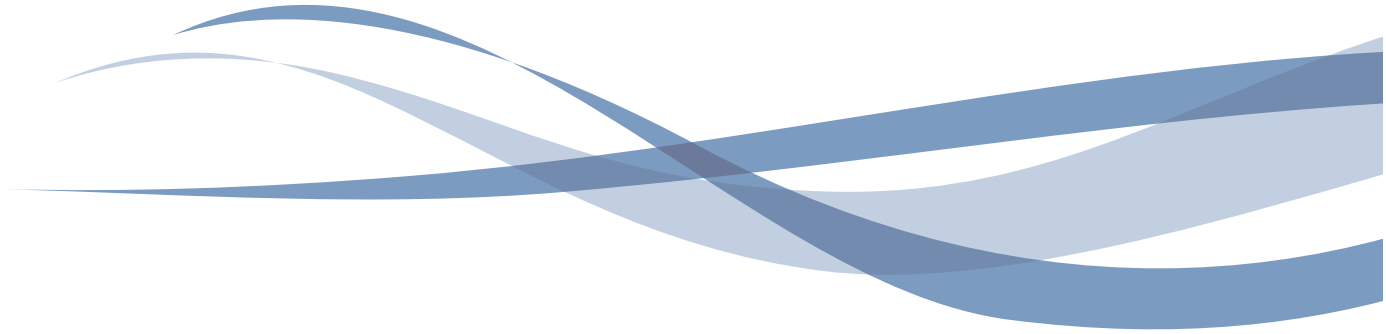
S **Supporting Elements:** Population-level supporting elements include ensuring equitable application of mental health standards of care; supporting early intervention programs, including strengthening the integration of mental health into existing early intervention programs and/or services for caregivers; developing capacity strengthening interventions that focus on the professionalization of the mental health workforce; integrating cultural and contextual factors into systems; creating regulatory frameworks to incorporate ethical practices into social and public services better.

R **Response:** Population-level initatives that strengthen social and public services include supporting stepped care options; expanding access by reducing barriers, such as those related to gender, financial status, transportation, mental health literacy, safety, and confidentiality; encourageing more person-centered and equitable mental health services; establishing or strengthening integrated crisis and mobile support teams (e.g., mandating the inclusion of mental health providers in law enforcement response teams); developing laws, policies, and regulations that increase access to community-based mental health services and decrease long-term institutional care; integrating trauma-informed approaches; creating regulatory frameworks that encourage recovery-based approaches with adequate follow-up care, multidisciplinary coordination, and effective case management services; and establishing mental health helplines (e.g., national suicide helplines).

See additional examples in the annex tables on page 31.

Contextualization

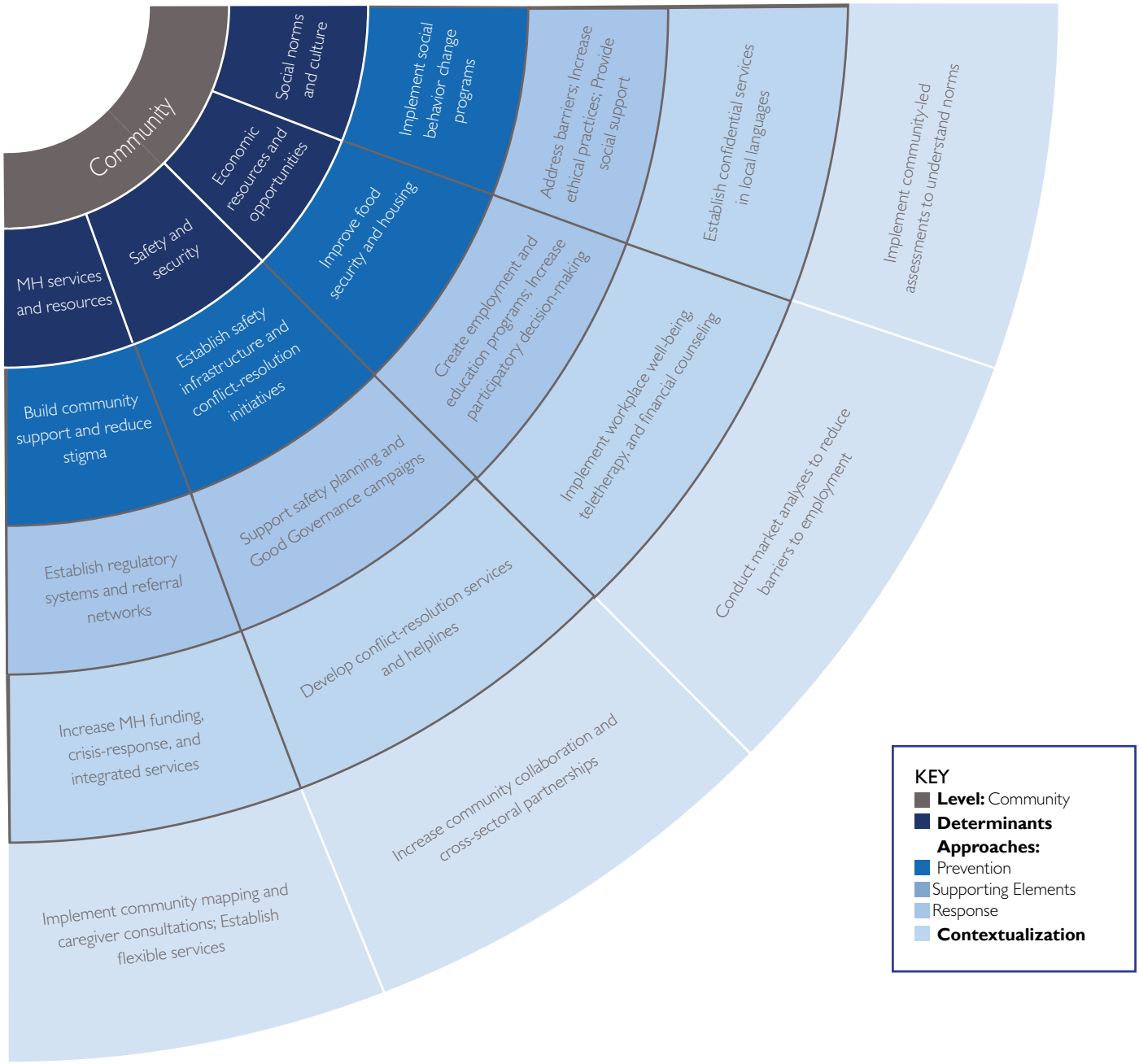
- Collaborate with local disaster/crisis response teams to strengthen their ability to provide adequate support (including basic mental health support) and reduce harm to those experiencing mental health challenges as they interact with these teams.
- Collaborate with local stakeholders to ensure that services are context-specific.
- Ensure that service users, caregivers, and others most impacted by services are integral to all phases of planning, implementation, and evaluation of these services.



Community Level

The community-level approach refers to aspects of the enabling environment for mental health that are applied at the community level. These include factors that address the availability, type, quality, and equity of essential services provided by the public sector or to meet the basic needs and rights of all individuals within a community. It also encompasses the safety and security of the community, access to resources and opportunities, and the social norms and culture that impact individuals and their mental health status, how people with mental health conditions and challenges are treated, and their tendency to seek and utilize services and other supports.

Many determinants and approaches are similar to and influenced by those at the population level. However, because individuals directly engage with programs, services, and other initiatives at the community level, the impact and opportunities to contextualize are significant. As with population-level approaches, mental health factors must be explicitly considered to achieve the desired effects.



Community Level

Determinant: Access to mental health services and resources[18]

The availability of high-quality social and public services significantly impacts communities' mental and physical health. Most often, the availability and quality of these services are partially determined at the population or systems level, often through government funding, regulations, policies, and programs, but are operationalized and contextualized at the community level.

Approach:

P **Prevention:** Community-level prevention approaches include providing general or issue-specific, preventative supports (e.g., parenting programs or programs related to general determinants, such as violence prevention, physical health issues, early intervention, or peer support programs), promoting mental health literacy, and reducing stigma.

S **Supporting elements:** Community-level supporting elements include establishing regulatory and legal frameworks; creating vetted referral networks and care coordination structures, programs and regulations that ensure equitable distribution and quality of resources and services; and building and maintaining strong support networks and connections among community members.

R **Response:** Community-level response approaches include proactively integrating mental health into crisis response structures; increasing mental health funding parity; reallocating funds to community-level mental health services and supports, such as by routing new funds or shifting existing funds away from institutional care; supporting communities as they tailor initiatives to their needs and priorities; strengthening regulatory systems to ensure integration and coordination among care providers; ensuring that services and support is culturally appropriate, safe and ethical; offering increased choice, facilitating supported decision-making and mental health directives, post-treatment care, and transitional services; strengthening the integration of mental health support into existing community infrastructure (e.g., education, safety net programs, law enforcement, justice systems, primary care, workplaces, emergency services); and integrating task-shifting and professionalization approaches into leveled systems of care to increase the availability of care.

See additional examples in the annex tables on page 32.

Contextualization:

- Collaborate with local stakeholders to understand specific needs and services and tailor mental health programs accordingly, including conducting community mapping of available services or support.
- Partner with community members to ensure cultural relevance and appropriateness of mental health services.
- Integrate local knowledge and practices into program design and implementation whilst upholding human rights standards, including, for example, co-creation and consultation with service users and caregivers.
- Ensure that services are adaptable to changing local conditions and needs.

2 Community Level

Determinant: Safety and security[19]

Living in a safe and secure environment promotes mental well-being; conversely, an unsafe environment increases exposure to potentially adverse and distressing events, increasing the likelihood that community members will experience mental health conditions. Population-level factors undoubtedly impact community safety and security; however, those impacts are often directly operationalized and experienced at the community level.

Approach

P **Prevention:** Community-level prevention approaches related to safety and security include securing neighborhood-gathering spaces (e.g., community centers); establishing safety infrastructure (e.g., well-lit paths); creating community-level violence prevention programs and outreach; ensuring safe public transportation; implementing programs and regulatory approaches that address the specific safety and security of marginalized groups; developing conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives; and designing programs that increase social cohesion.

S **Supporting elements:** Community-level supporting elements include increasing safety planning (e.g., urban and infrastructure plans) and implementation; developing legal frameworks that promote community safety and security; creating local regulations and systems strengthening activities that integrate improved safety and security into various sectors and organizations (e.g., schools, workplaces); establishing strong confidentiality and privacy regulations and accountability structures; initiating neighborhood watch programs, especially those that promote safety and inclusion of specific groups of people such as those with mental health issues or members of other marginalized groups; supporting civic education campaigns to promote good governance for community safety factors, and designing mental health community programs and services that address safety and security barriers.

R **Response:** Community-level response approaches to safety and security include, but are not limited to, integrating mental health considerations, including trained professionals, into cross-sectoral safety and security services (e.g., policing, justice systems); establishing conflict resolution services; implementing case management services for those who have experienced safety and security violations; integrating regulations and local policy that supports the safety and security of service users and caregivers and provides access to justice and other recourse when violated; creating anonymous helplines and referral pathways to multisectoral service providers, including access to justice, social services, and security services; and supporting groups and peer support programs for those who have experienced violations to their safety and security.

See additional examples in the annex tables on page 32.

Contextualization

- Conduct community mapping to identify gaps and opportunities to improve mental health-integrated safety and security within communities, including those related to accessing mental health support.
- Establish cross-sectoral and other community partnerships to address safety and security issues.
- Collaborate with various local actors, including marginalized groups and various segments of communities, to identify safety and security needs and possible solutions and implement strategies to address them.
- Work with local actors to understand local conflicts and community tensions and support their efforts to ensure interventions do not exacerbate these issues.
- Identify, support, and build on effective existing programs and initiatives that integrate mental health, safety, and security.

3 Community Level

Determinant: Economic resources and opportunities[20]

A community's economic resources and opportunities significantly affect mental health. This relationship can be bidirectional, where mental health and economic challenges exacerbate each other. Key factors include access to jobs that pay a living wage, other income-generating opportunities (e.g., job creation, entrepreneurship), national and local financial stability, and the community's overall economic health.

Approach

P **Prevention:** Community-level prevention efforts include ensuring mental health considerations are taken into account in community-level food, housing, education, and employment programs; integrating regulations and other approaches that address barriers to economic equality; establishing financial literacy programs that reduce financial stress; and supporting local efforts that promote economic growth.

S **Supporting Elements:** Community-level supporting elements that address this determinant include designing multi-stakeholder approaches to decreasing economic disparities, including promoting equitable compensation; creating employment and education programs for people with mental health challenges; and establishing equitable and participatory decision-making in public service regarding mental health resource allocation and planning.

R **Response:** Community-level response approaches that address this determinant include equitable access to employment, workplace mental health and well-being programs, access to mental health leave for employees, free or low-cost accessible mental health treatment and care, establishing options for teletherapy to increase access to those living in remote/rural areas, and financial counseling.

See additional examples in the annex tables on page 33.

Contextualization

- Work with local stakeholders to complete economic and market analyses integrating mental health considerations.
- Collaborate with local actors to address community-specific barriers to employment and other livelihood activities.
- Work with local actors to complete gender analyses to understand cultural and gender norms related to work, entrepreneurship, and access to capital and financial systems; research contextual information about gender roles and economic responsibilities and integrate findings to provide gender transformative, contextualized mental health-integrated programming to address this determinant.
- Work with members of marginalized groups to complete inclusive development analyses to identify barriers to economic stability and access to mental health services and collaborate with local actors to address these barriers.

4 Community Level

Determinant: Culture and social norms:[21]

A community's prevailing cultural and social norms significantly impact mental health in complex and interrelated ways. Communities that stigmatize mental health or discourage help-seeking behaviors often exacerbate the difficulties faced by individuals with mental health challenges and conditions. Norms that support inequity, discrimination, violence, stigmatization, and other human rights violations can increase the likelihood that mental health challenges will develop and/or be exacerbated and reduce access to needed support. Conversely, norms that foster mutual support, prioritize mental health support systems, including individuals with lived experience, view mental health as a human rights concern, and normalize attention to mental health can decrease the likelihood and severity of mental health challenges.

Approach:

P **Prevention:** Prevention approaches that address this determinant include destigmatizing mental health challenges; utilizing locally led social and behavior change strategies to shift harmful norms and cultural practices; addressing harmful gender norms, such as those related to participation in political systems, access to education, and gender-based violence; increasing availability of safe and effective medical care and fair compensation in the workplace; and supporting mental health literacy programs that normalize accessing mental health support, teaching coping skills and practices, and encouraging help/support-seeking behavior supported by cultural, religious or other leaders.

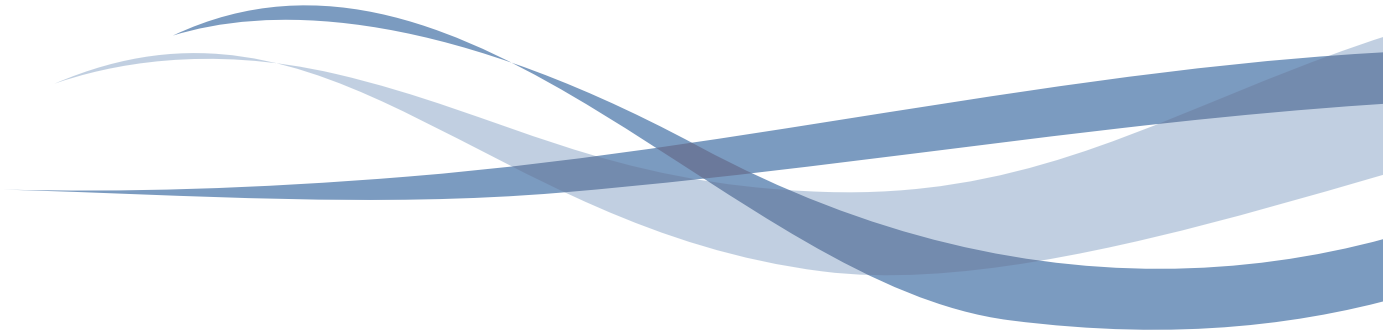
S **Supporting elements:** Supporting elements that can address this determinant include shifting norms that contribute to the maintenance of barriers to care for particular groups; supporting regulatory frameworks and policies that decrease human rights violations toward people with mental health challenges; increasing the use of locally developed ethical practices and establishing accountability mechanisms; providing social support services in culturally significant places and/or by peers or respected community members; and establishing regulations or local policies that shift attitudes and practices toward people with mental health challenges.

R **Response:** Response elements that can adress this determinant include offering culturally and contextually appropriate mental health services in the communities where people work, live, and play; integrating traditional practices that promote care into mental health services and support with full respect for human rights; engaging local religious and other community leaders; increasing the number of providers who speak local languages or, when not possible, offering translation/interpretation services; developing helplines that provide support aligned with cultural concepts of mental health; establishing confidential and private referral and services; and ensuring that service providers reduce cultural concerns about help-seeking behaviors (e.g., where possible and helpful, match provider and service users on key factors such as gender, religion, etc.).

See additional examples in the annex tables on page 33.

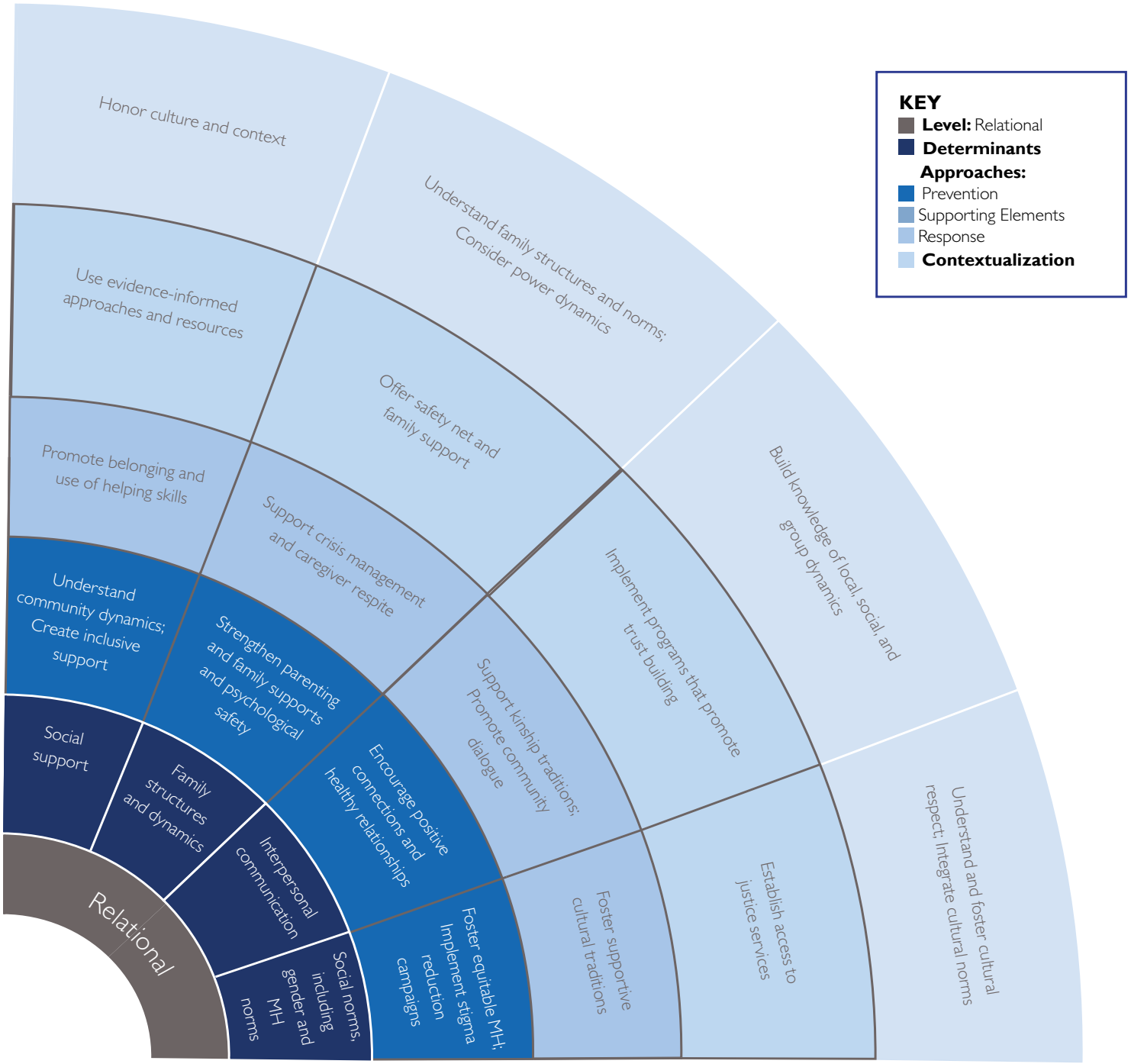
Contextualization:

- Collaborate with local actors to conduct gender and inclusive development analyses that consider factors related to mental health and integrate findings into programming.
- Work with local actors to understand local conceptualizations and norms related to mental health and help-seeking behaviors.
- Work with local stakeholders to understand community norms and narratives about mental health and the potential impacts of trauma.
- Implement community-led needs assessments to identify gaps, barriers to care, and preferred solutions.



Relational Level

Relational-level approaches ensure that individuals receive support through interactions with family members, friends, colleagues, and other close connections. This level emphasizes the importance of approaches that enhance interpersonal dynamics. Unlike the population and community levels, which focus on policies and systems needed to create an enabling environment, the relational level is where people directly interact with these services and programs, ensuring that they can manage their relationships in ways that support mental health.



Relational Level

Determinant: Social support[22]

Social support and a strong sense of belonging and connectedness within a community can protect against mental health challenges and promote resilience and recovery. Conversely, social isolation, exclusion, rejection, and loneliness significantly contribute to the development of mental health challenges.

Approach:

P **Prevention:** Prevention-level approaches to address this determinant include establishing and/or reinforcing supportive networks that respect community dynamics and peer-led school initiatives.

S **Supporting elements:** Supporting elements that address this determinant include promoting a sense of belonging and collective care, providing widespread education about and use of foundational helping skills, and increasing access to community programs to promote social cohesion.

R **Response:** Response-level approaches to addressing this determinant include establishing anger and conflict management services programs and other skills to strengthen relationships; implementing safe reconciliation programs; increasing accessible services for couples and families, including therapy; providing access to justice services; rethinking the relevance and acceptability of sources of evidence (e.g., diversifying the evidence base by supporting research on local approaches and/or co-creation); designing helplines designed to support families and/or couples; and integrating local language, practices, ceremonies, values, heritage, and worldview into mental health programs and supports.

See additional examples in the annex tables on page 35.

Contextualization:

- Ensure knowledge of culture and context to promote a sense of belonging and foster community support systems.
- Design engagement strategies that honor cultural identity and collective values.
- Collaborate with local groups and community structures to foster a sense of belonging.
- Address potential stigma associated with mental health support.
- Foster inclusion of people with lived experience, caregivers, service users, and other local/community stakeholders to inform all contextualization efforts and all phases of programs, services, and supports.

Determinant: Family structures and dynamics[23]

The dynamics within a family, including parent-child relationships, sibling relationships, and the overall family environment, play a crucial role in one's general well-being and mental health status across the life course. A variety of individual, relationship, community, and population-related factors influence these dynamics and provide opportunities to improve the enabling environment for better mental health, decrease reactions to adverse events and potentially distressing circumstances, and support those with mental health challenges.

Approach:

P **Prevention:** Prevention approaches to address this determinant include strengthening programs for social supports for families; contextualizing education and other efforts to encourage psychological safety within families; providing family-centered mental health education and support; and parenting and family support.

S **Supporting elements:** Supporting elements that address this determinant include strengthening family communication and support systems; establishing crisis management services; supporting respite care for caregivers; and providing problem management services that support coping and resilience.

R **Response:** Response approaches to address this determinant include engaging families in mental health services; increasing access to culturally relevant family and systems-based therapies; increasing affordable case management services; offering safety net programs that address basic needs and decrease family stress; and increasing access to mental health services for individuals and families.

See additional examples in the annex tables on page 35.

Contextualization:

- Recognize diversity in family structures to support inclusion.
- Understand cultural and socioeconomic pressures and barriers that might influence family dynamics.
- Be aware of cultural and gender norms related to family roles, hierarchies, and expectations.
- Foster inclusion of people with lived experience, caregivers, service users, local mental health providers, and other local/community stakeholders to inform all contextualization efforts and all phases of programs, services, and supports.

Determinant: Interpersonal communication

Interpersonal communication involves individuals exchanging information, feelings, and thoughts through verbal and nonverbal messages. The quality of this communication can significantly influence an individual's emotional well-being.[24]

Approach:

P **Prevention:** Approaches to prevention that address this determinant include encouraging locally led, contextually relevant programs that promote healthy relationships, strong social bonds, and positive emotional connections; fostering supportive human resource and workplace policies; creating programs that improve relationship skills, such as culturally relevant communication, healthy emotional expression, stress management, and listening skills; teaching skills that contribute to healthy relationships; and creating programs that create safe and inclusive spaces to build positive relationships.

S **Supporting elements:** Supporting elements that address this determinant include fostering facilitated dialogue; working with communities to increase family programs and activities; designing media and other campaigns to encourage help-seeking behavior; providing capacity strengthening for parents that is contextually relevant; developing initiatives that strengthen relationships; and creating opportunities for members to support each other (e.g., encouraging supportive kinship and cultural traditions).

R **Response:** Relationship response approaches to improving interpersonal interactions include offering conflict resolution services; building trust and encouraging strong relationships; integrating culturally based practices into family and relationship-related therapy; and providing other mental health support.

See additional examples in the annex tables on page 36.

Contextualization:

- Build knowledge of and work with local social, relationship, and group dynamics.
- Conduct mental health integrated gender and inclusive development analyses and integrate findings into program design and implementation.
- Collaborate with local actors to integrate an understanding of norms related to mental health and interpersonal relationships.
- Support locally led interventions prioritizing community needs and preferences related to literacy levels, language, and communication norms.

4 Relational Level

Determinant: Social norms, including those related to gender and mental health[25]

Refer to the societal and cultural expectations and rules that dictate appropriate behaviors, roles, responsibilities, and attributes within relationships. Social norms have a complex and multidirectional relationship with mental health at all levels, including the relational level. They can influence various mental health and well-being factors, such as the likelihood that specific relationships will provide support or cause harm. Social norms also affect whether people are willing or able to offer and/or utilize support (e.g., relationship therapy), how children are treated, the level of violence considered acceptable within a relationship, and the level of accountability a community provides for those who cause harm.

Approach:

P **Prevention:** Prevention-based approaches addressing this determinant at the relational level include fostering equitable mental health norms in relationships; implementing mental health stigma reduction campaigns; working with local leaders to address harmful norms related to interpersonal relationships and mental health; developing communication programs that promote healthy relationships; and establishing programs or interventions that teach skills for navigating conversations about roles and responsibilities in relationships, such as those related to gender.

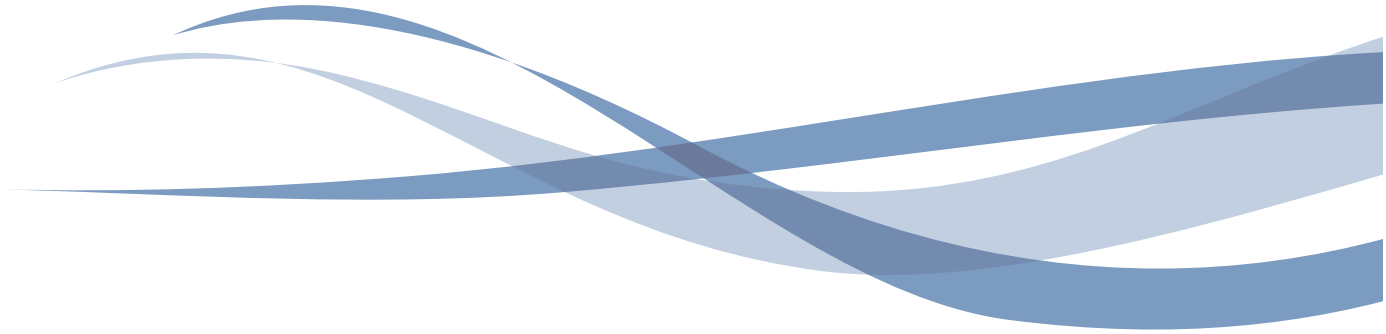
S **Supporting elements:** Relationship-level approaches to strengthening supporting elements include facilitating dialogues and community discussions related to mental health (e.g., stigma); designing programs that integrate mental health considerations into cultural practices and traditions and vice versa; implementing initiatives that integrate the perspectives of diverse groups of people (e.g., women, girls, Indigenous peoples, etc.); supporting laws, policies, and regulations that address social norms; and integrating mental health considerations into gender-transformative programs.

R **Response:** Relational approaches to address this determinant include creating support groups, mental health programs, and interventions that integrate norms-based considerations and access to justice services.

See additional examples in the annex tables on page 36.

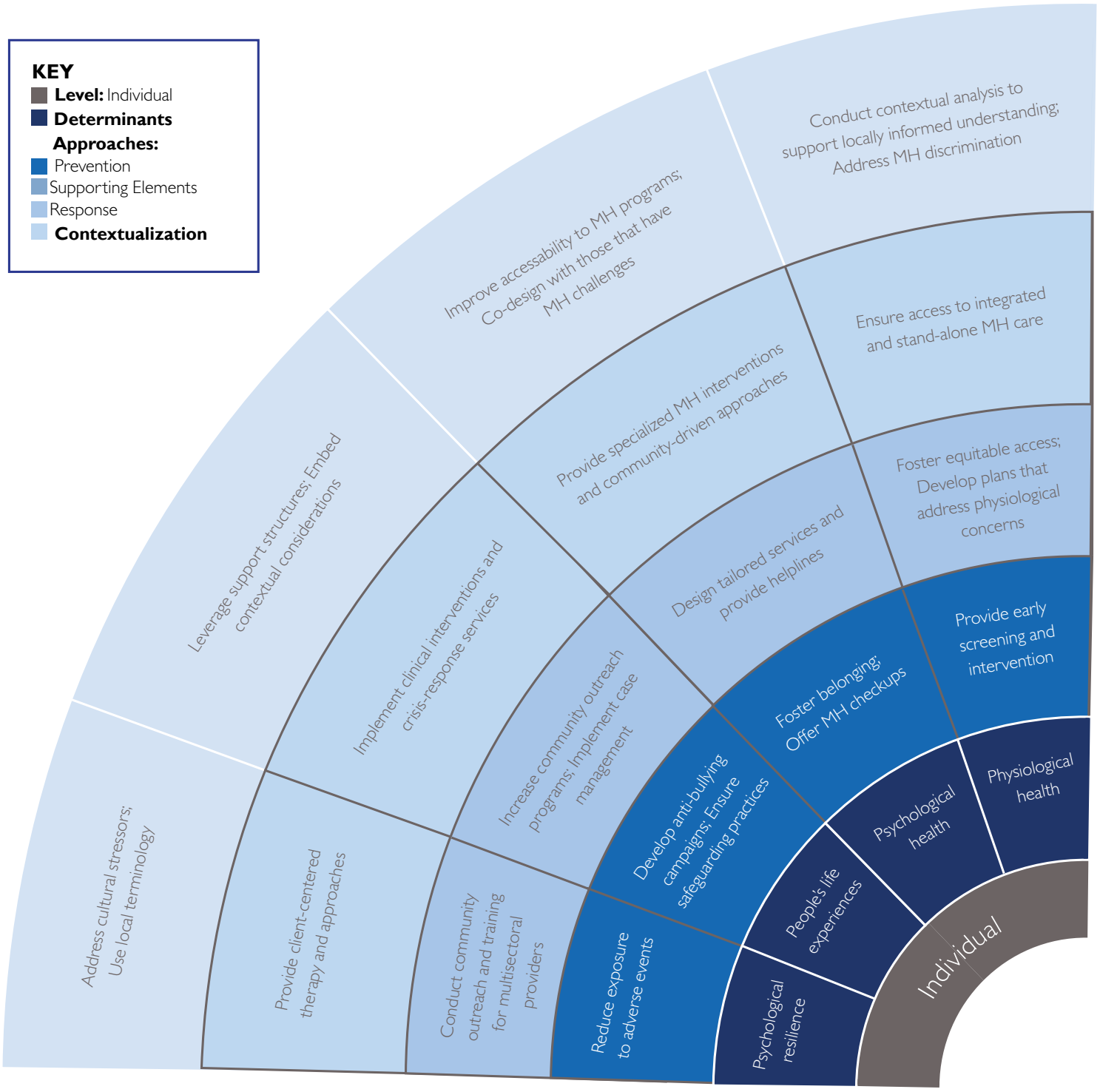
Contextualization:

- Understand and foster cultural respect, humility, and safety.
- Integrate cultural norms related to mental health into programs and other initiatives (e.g., level of collectivism vs. individualism) and conduct gender, inclusive development analyses that integrate concerns from many different groups.
- Engage men and boys in programs that not only refer to their role concerning women but also address their problems.
- Identify and collaborate with local champions or role models.

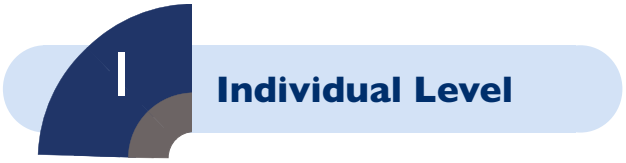


Individual Level

Individual-level approaches focus on providing direct support through accessible services and programs that cater to each person's unique circumstances and mental health needs. This level emphasizes using client-centered approaches to building mental health literacy, learning coping skills, and building resilience to outside stressors.



Individual Level



Determinant: Psychological resilience, resources, and skills[26]

The ability to recover psychologically from challenges can vary among individuals. If well-developed, it can help someone adapt to and recover from difficult life situations. If less developed or lacking, mental health distress may increase when someone faces challenges, such as a loss or other potentially traumatizing events.

Approach:

P **Prevention:** Prevention-level approaches related to this determinant include strengthening resilience, resources, and skills (e.g., coping and problem-solving skills, emotional regulation, stress management, relaxation and self-soothing techniques, mental health literacy, social skills training) that foster well-being and decrease the likelihood of experiencing mental health challenges; implementing initiatives that reduce exposure to adverse life events and other determinants or provide mentoring, coaching or coping skills training to those who have experienced these types of events; and providing workplace programs that provide support, share culturally relevant coping strategies and foster a psychologically safe environment.

S **Supporting elements:** Supporting elements related to this determinant at the individual level include providing mental health literacy, skills training, and community programs that foster supportive relationships; and strengthening skills training for teachers, primary care providers, and traditional and spiritual leaders to provide supportive interactions.

R **Response:** Response-level approaches related to this determinant include providing individual and group-based therapy and other focused support; establishing client-centered approaches; implementing strength- and recovery-based inteventions and supports; and sharing vetted referral pathways to facilitate help-seeking behaviors.

See additional examples in the annex tables on page 37.

Contextualization:

- Use contextually and culturally rooted approaches.
- Ensure interventions address culturally specific stressors and coping mechanisms.
- Use culturally sensitive practices and local terminology related to mental health conditions.
- Conduct feasibility analyses and factor in local economic challenges when planning for interventions.

2 Individual Level

Determinant: People's life experiences[27]

Context, environment, and circumstances contribute significantly to an individual's well-being. Exposure to potentially traumatizing events, such as natural disasters, adverse childhood experiences, war, gender-based violence, physical or emotional abuse, accidents, or the loss of a loved one, can have profound and long-term impacts on individuals' mental health. Although many people recover on their own, some people experience long-term mental health challenges, which are exacerbated in the absence of appropriate and accessible support.

Approach:

P **Prevention:** Prevention approaches at the individual level include increasing access to integrated preventative services (e.g., community systems, such as early intervention, healthcare, justice systems, education, and primary healthcare); bolstering community supports; fostering supportive interpersonal connections; developing school-based anti-bullying campaigns; using comprehensive safeguarding practices; and promoting supports for parents and caregivers.

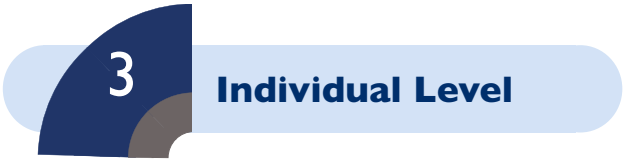
S **Supporting elements:** Supporting elements related to this determinant include increasing access to and exposure to community outreach programs, case management, equitable access to services, safety and security infrastructure, and social assistance programs.

R **Response:** Response approaches related to this determinant at the individual level include implementing direct services for individuals such as clinical/psychological interventions (e.g., psychotherapy, peer support programs, family education, crisis response services, access to safe and secure environments and services, and substance use programs).

See additional examples in the annex tables on page 37.

Contextualization:

- Understand regulatory, legal, economic, and policy context.
- Collaborate with local actors throughout all phases of the Program Cycle and conduct needs assessments.
- Embed contextually relevant psychological, environmental, and age/stage considerations into programs.
- Understand relevant psychological, biographical, interpersonal, and developmental factors and dynamics.
- Integrate collective experiences as relevant (i.e., natural disaster, war, communal violence, intergenerational trauma).
- Integrate cultural narratives.
- Leverage family- and community-support structures.
- Integrate local healing practices.
- Foster a culturally relevant understanding of human rights protections.



Determinant: Psychological health

Psychological health refers to an individual's emotional, social, and psychological state and encompasses how individuals feel about themselves and their lives, their sense of purpose, their relationships, and their ability to manage their emotions and behavior.

Approach:

P **Prevention:** Prevention approaches at the individual level include creating mental health literacy and psychoeducation initiatives; strengthening advocacy and awareness raising; establishing emotional wellness and self-care programs, including integration into community settings such as schools and workplaces; offering mental health checkups in primary care; fostering interconnected emotional belonging through targeted interventions; addressing determinants of mental well-being; and promoting physical health, including exercise and nutrition programs that integrate knowledge about their impacts on mental health.

S **Supporting elements:** Supporting elements at the individual level for this determinant include ensuring access to quality services and supports, including helplines and support groups; designing access to services tailored to the needs of various groups; supporting initiatives that encourage help-seeking behaviors and reduce barriers to access; providing job counseling; and integrating trauma-informed approaches into public safety services.

R **Response:** Individual-level approaches to psychological health include providing individual clinical interventions; increasing access to case management services; promoting person-centered, strength-based, and recovery-focused substance use programs; and strengthening social support.

See additional examples in the annex tables on page 38.

Contextualization:

- Co-design with people who have mental health challenges, caregivers, and other stakeholders.
- Understand and address the needs of diverse groups of people.
- Understand community-specific accessibility constraints.
- Understand and respect local conceptualizations and indicators of psychological well-being.
- Use local concepts of holistic, person- and community-centered approaches to understand and address this determinant.
- Collaborate with local stakeholders to understand how stigma related to mental health operates across relevant levels and integrate it into programming.
- Consider the availability and accessibility of service providers for different groups and settings.
- Recognize and work within community dynamics.

4 Individual Level

Determinant: Physiological health[28]

Genetic and other biological and health factors play a role in predisposing individuals to specific mental health conditions. Addressing these physiological determinants through mental health services and support is crucial for improving mental health outcomes.

Approach:

P **Prevention:** Prevention-level approaches to this determinant include providing early screening and intervention for mental health conditions and determinants; conducting developmental assessments, including at birth, during adolescence, and throughout the life cycle; providing treatment for medical issues; increasing access to primary physical and mental health services; and implementing supports and skill building related to physiological health concerns.

S **Supporting elements:** Supporting elements-level approaches to this determinant include fostering equitable access to mental and physical health support and services; integrating mental health considerations into treatments for physical health concerns; providing physical, occupational, and speech therapy; and developing individual education plans that address physiological concerns.

R **Response:** Response approaches for this determinant at the individual level include ensuring access to integrated and stand alone mental health interventions, specialist care, and treatment for physical health concerns.

See additional examples in the annex tables on page 38.

Contextualization:

- Conduct contextual analysis of an individual's environment.
- Understand local beliefs about heredity as they relate to mental health.
- Consider how interventions can integrate traditional practices.
- Work with local actors to develop and work with a locally informed understanding of how stigma and discrimination impact mental health and approaches to addressing mental health at various levels.
- Integrate a locally informed understanding of the interaction between physical and mental health.

Annex Tables

These tables expand upon the information included within USAID's Mental Health Framework graphics. While the graphic prioritizes key actions from the report, the table includes more suggested actions.

Population Level

Determinants	Prevention Approach	Supporting Elements Approach	Response Approach	Contextualization
Environment and context	• Increase emergency preparedness and safety • Violence and conflict prevention • Increase social cohesion • Address climate change • Reduce mental health (MH) stigma campaigns • Address determinants • Implement urban and infrastructure planning that encourages social support or addresses other MH needs	• Implement MH literacy campaigns • Reduce access to harmful and dangerous chemicals • Increase access to green spaces • Establish MH regulatory, ethical standards, and accountability • Strengthen systems factors that professionalize the mental health workforce	• Integrate MH support across various systems/ sectors • Support MH during crises and conflict • Integrate support for MH and crisis staff/providers • Provide emergency and climate disaster MH response services • Provide access to legal support services	• Partner at the national-level to understand the most relevant factors to address MH • Partner with members of marginalized groups to address specific needs • Collaborate and coordinate with local and international crisis response teams • Create MH system-level partnerships and linkages • Partner with local actors to understand context, including social norms and culture
Legislation and policies	• Promote anti-discrimination MH legislation and policies • Educate policymakers about MH • Improve digital safety • Promote policies and legislation that support community safety and security	• Establish interventions that combat MH stigma • Fund basic and applied research related to MH • Establish regulatory and ethical standards, review boards and accountability systems • Integrate MH and human rights into all policies and legislation • Professionalize MH providers • Train on multi-sectoral approaches to MH	• Establish and strengthen standards of MH care, practice, service user rights frameworks, and reporting mechanisms • Promote legislation that requires or establishes care coordination, referral mechanisms, and emergency response mechanisms • Promote legislation that increases access to justice for people with MH challenges	• Conduct economic and market analyses • Reduce community-specific barriers to employment • Conduct gender analyses that integrate MH • Conduct inclusive development analyses that integrate MH

Population Level

Determinants	Prevention Approach	Supporting Elements Approach	Response Approach	Contextualization
Legislation and policies	• Promote policies and legislation that address social determinants	• Decriminalize MH and support deinstitutionalization of those with MH challenges		
Economic factors	• Create poverty alleviation initiatives • Improve social protection programs • Increase access to health and MH care • Integrate MH services into livelihood initiatives	• Address housing and food insecurity • Ensure equitable compensation	• Support career and education programs • Reduce financial barriers to MH care • Increase workforce compensation • Support individuals with MH challenges that have lower incomes • Increase flexibility of MH services by address barriers to care	• Collaborate with national actors working on economic growth and related efforts • Capitalize on community assets and strengths
Social and public services	• Strengthen finance systems • Strengthen MH care systems • Integrate prevention programs into systems • Establish comprehensive funding structures	• Ensure equitable standards of care • Integrate MH into early intervention programs • Support MH provider professionalization • Strengthen the integration of ethical practices into systems	• Tiered care options • Expand access and remove barriers to access • Establish equitable and person-centered MH care • Establish integrated crisis response teams that include MH professionals • Increase access to community-based MH care • Support long-term MH recovery • Implement case management • Integrate trauma-informed approaches • Establish MH-related helplines	• Collaborate with national social and public service systems • Create context-specific services • Collaborate with service users and caregivers • Integrate cultural and contextual factors into systems

Community Level

Determinants	Prevention Approach	Supporting Elements Approach	Response Approach	Contextualization
MH services and resources	• Build community support for MH interventions • Develop MH stigma reduction initiatives • Conduct MH literacy campaigns	• Ensure equitable distribution of MH resources and services • Establish community MH regulatory systems • Create vetted MH referral networks • Strengthen community networks and connections	• Increase or reallocate MH funding • Ensure MH crisis response readiness • Develop MH services that respond to the needs and priorities of communities • Establish MH integrated services • Implement culturally appropriate ethical and safe practices • Ensure multiple options for MH service selection • Use task sharing and peer support as components of systems strengthening • Establish aftercare and transitional MH services	• Implement community mapping of MH services • Increase community collaboration around MH services • Conduct service user and caregiver consultations • Establish flexible services meeting local conditions and needs
Safety and security	• Secure neighborhood gathering spaces • Establish safety infrastructure (e.g. lit paths) • Create community-level violence prevention programs and outreach • Develop conflict resolution initiatives	• Safety planning • Support local community safety regulations and frameworks • Support good governance campaigns • Promote local security systems strengthening • Establish strong privacy and confidentiality frameworks with accountability	• Integrate MH into policing and justice systems • Establish conflict resolution services • Address service user and caregiver safety and security concerns • Establish MH-related helplines • Implement case management • Create improved referral pathways • Establish access to justice and social services • Develop peer support programs	• Increase community collaboration around MH and security • Increase collaboration with marginalized groups • Develop cross sectoral partnerships • Expand existing violence prevention programs and initiatives

Community Level

Determinants	Prevention Approach	Supporting Elements Approach	Response Approach	Contextualization
Economic resources and opportunities	• Improve community-level food security and housing support • Establish education and employment programs • Reduce barriers to income equality • Establish financial literacy programs	• Address economic disparities • Increase equitable compensation • Create employment and education programs for people with MH challenges • Establish equitable and participatory decision-making regarding MH resource allocation and planning	• Ensure people have MH leave as a benefit • Create equitable access to employment programs • Establish workplace MH and well-being programs • Create access to free or low-cost MH treatment and care • Develop options for teletherapy • Provide access to financial counseling	• Conduct economic and market analyses • Reduce community-specific barriers to employment • Conduct gender analyses that integrate MH • Conduct inclusive development analyses that integrate MH
Social norms and culture	• Destigmatize MH challenges • Implement social behavior change programs • Addressing norms about MH • Increase MH literacy • Address gender disparities and harmful practices	• Provide social support in culturally significant places and/or by peers or respected community members • Support regulatory frameworks that decrease human rights violations and shift attitudes and practices	• Create localized support for MH • Utilize contextualized MH approaches • Develop culturally aligned MH helplines • Establish confidential and private MH referral and services	• Conduct gender analyses that integrate MH • Conduct inclusive development analyses that integrate MH • Understand community norms and narratives about MH and trauma • Implement community-led needs assessments

Community Level

Determinants	Prevention Approach	Supporting Elements Approach	Response Approach	Contextualization
Economic resources and opportunities	• Implement safe and effective MH care • Develop MH anti-stigma campaigns led or supported by cultural, religious or other leaders	• Increase locally developed ethical MH practices • Address barriers created by harmful norms	• Engage local religious and other leaders to shift norms related to MH help seeking • Use local languages or offer translation/ interpretation services • Train service providers to ease cultural concerns about help-seeking behavior	

Relational Level

Determinants	Prevention Approach	Supporting Elements Approach	Response Approach	Contextualization
Social support	• Create inclusive support networks • Understand community dynamics • Establish peer-led initiatives in schools	• Promote community cohesion • Promote widespread use of foundational helping skills within support networks • Promote belonging and collective care	• Link interventions with culture • Implement family or couples interventions • Implement anger and conflict management programs • Implement safe reconciliation programs • Establish access to justice services • Establish MH-related helplines • Use evidence-informed approaches and resources	• Ensure knowledge of culture and context as foundation for support and belonging • Design strategies that honor culture and collective values • Collaborate with local groups • Address MH stigma • Include persons with lived experience in design and implementation
Family structures and dynamics	• Provide family-centered support services • Provide parenting support services • Strengthen social supports for families • Foster psychological safety within families	• Strengthen family support systems • Establish crisis management services • Establish problem management services • Support caregiver respite services	• Involve family in MH care • Provide family support programs and therapy • Increase access to family and system-based therapies • Establish family case management services • Offer safety net programs that address • Basic needs and decrease family stress	• Understand family structures and norms • Consider power dynamics in families • Include those with lived experience in design and implementation

Relational Level

Determinants	Prevention Approach	Supporting Elements Approach	Response Approach	Contextualization
Interpersonal communication	• Encourage positive emotional connections • Foster healthy/ supportive relationships and social bonds • Encourage supportive human resource and workplace policies • Create communication and listening skills programs • Create programs that teach relationship skills	• Increase family programs and activities • Support kinship and cultural traditions • Create media programs to encourage help-seeking • Teach positive parenting and caregiver helping skills • Promote facilitated community dialogue • Develop educational programs that teach relationship skills	• Implement family and relationship therapy • Offer conflict resolution services • Implement programs that promote trust building	• Integrate knowledge of knowledge of local social and group dynamics • Conduct gender and inclusive development analyses that integrate MH • Work with local actors to understand community norms and norms related to MH • Ensure that all programs are locally-led and contextualized
Social norms, including gender and mental health norms	• Foster equitable MH and gender roles/norms • Implement MH stigma reduction campaigns • Establish programs or interventions that teach skills for navigating conversations about roles and responsibilities in relationships, such as those related to gender • Work with local leaders to address harmful norms related to MH • Develop communication campaigns to promote healthy relationships	• Implement locally facilitated community dialogue • Foster supportive cultural traditions/ practices/ ceremonies • Integrate MH into gender transformative programs (and vice versa) • Support laws, policies, and regulations that address social norms	• Support CSO's encouraging positive norms related to mental health • Establish access to justice services • Implement programs that support the use of therapy to address MH issues related to stigma and discrimination	• Understand and foster cultural respect and safety • Integrate cultural norms related to MH • Conduct gender and/ or inclusive development analyses that integrate MH and concerns from many different groups

Individual Level

Determinants	Prevention Approach	Supporting Elements Approach	Response Approach	Contextualization
Psychological resilience	• Strengthen resilience, knowledge, and skills • Implement initiatives that reduce exposure to adverse events • Provide workplace programs that foster support and psychological safety	• Conduct community outreach on MH • Implement MH literacy programs • Skills training for multisectoral providers • Skills training for community members to encourage supportive engagements	• Provide individual and group-based therapy • Establish client-centered approaches • Implement strengths-and recovery-based approaches • Share vetted referrals to encourage help-seeking behaviors	• Use contextually and culturally rooted approaches • Ensure approaches address culturally specific stressors and coping mechanisms • Use culturally sensitive local terminology • Conduct feasibility analyses to support sustainability
People's life experiences	• Increase access to integrated mental health (MH) services • Bolster community support services • Promote supportive interpersonal connections • Develop anti-bullying campaigns • Ensure safeguarding practices in interventions	• Increase access to community outreach programs • Implement case management services • Promote equitable access to services • Ensure safety and security infrastructure • Support social assistance programs	• Implement clinical psychological interventions • Promote access to family education • Promote access to peer support • Establish crisis response services • Provide access to safe and secure environments and services	• Leverage support structures • Understand regulatory, legal, economic, and policy context • Collaborate with local actors throughout program • Conduct needs assessments • Embed contextually relevant considerations into services • Understand interpersonal dynamics

Individual Level				
Determinants	**Prevention Approach**	**Supporting Elements Approach**	**Response Approach**	**Contextualization**
Psychological health	• Establish emotional wellness supports • Promote MH literacy • Foster interconnected emotional belonging • Offer MH checkups during healthcare visits	• Ensure access to quality MH services and support • Provide access to helplines and support groups • Design services tailored to the needs of specific groups • Integrate trauma-informed approaches into public safety services	• Provide clinical/ specialized MH interventions, including therapy • Implement community-driven MH approaches • Implement rights-based approaches • Strengthen social support • Provide case management services	• Co-design with those that have MH challenges • Improve accessibility to MH programs • Develop holistic approaches to MH • Understand and address MH stigma • Understand and integrate local concepts related to MH into initiatives
Physiological health	• Conduct developmental assessments • Provide early screening and intervention • Provide treatment for medical issues	• Foster equitable access to quality services and supports • Provide physical, occupational, and speech therapy • Integrate MH into physical health care • Develop education plans that address physiological concerns	• Ensure access to integrated and stand-alone MH care • Provide treatment for physical health concerns	• Utilize integrated approaches to MH and healthcare • Conduct contextual analyses • Address MH stigma and discrimination • Integrate a locally-informed understanding of the interaction between physical and MH

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