

PRESS RELEASE

From Awareness to Action: UNITE Launches a Mental Health Policy Desk at the margins of the 80th United Nations General Assembly

New York, September 29th, 2025: [The UNITE Parliamentarians Network for Global Health](#), under the high patronage of Portugal, France, Uruguay, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), officially launched a new **Mental Health Policy Desk**. This is the latest of UNITE's flagship initiatives to promote parliamentary engagement on pressing global health issues.

The launch, convened at the Permanent Mission of Portugal to the United Nations on the margins of UNGA last Friday, was held just one day after the Political Declaration on the Prevention of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), which for the first time included a historic reference to mental health.

It brought together multistakeholder champions for mental health, including distinguished government leaders:

- the Minister of Health of Cape Verde, Dr. Jorge Figueiredo;
- the Minister of Health of Mozambique, Dr. Ussene Isse;
- the Portuguese Secretary of State for Health, Dr.^a Ana Povo;
- the French Ambassador for Global Health, Hon. Anne-Claire Amprou;

alongside parliamentarians, representatives of international organizations such as WHO and OECD, and private sector partners. The discussions underscored the urgent need to catalyze stronger political action, sustainable investment, and evidence-based legislation to address the global mental health crisis.

Mental Health remains a critical yet chronically underlooked and stigmatized global need. More than one in eight people worldwide – over 970 million individuals – live with a mental health disorder, yet, systemic underinvestment means that over 75% of those affected by mental health conditions in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), receive no form of treatment. The global economic cost of untreated mental health conditions exceeds **\$1 trillion annually** in lost productivity, proving that the impact extends far beyond the health sector.

“ The partnership with UNITE is extremely important to us at the OECD. (...) Whatever the evidence we bring, if we don't get people to use it [as advocacy support], then, it is completely irrelevant. So, for us it is very, very important to work together, because (...) [it is] through your network that change happens. ” said **Guillaume Dedet**, Senior Health Economist, Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, OECD.

“ To hear that only 7% of the world population that lives with depression actually have access to the services that they need is devastating. (...) That is yet another source of inspiration that the work of UNITE and its new Policy Desk is of critical importance. A Declaration is a piece of paper until you make something out of it. You need political leadership. Being able to work on concrete countries, focusing on concrete impact and measurable changes on the political front is what UNITE is focused on.” declared **Hon. Dr. Ricardo Baptista Leite**, Founder and President of UNITE.

Through the Desk, UNITE will strive to strengthen political leadership and allyship for the topic of Mental Health, supporting national legislative frameworks and adequate financing, while embedding Mental Health into parliamentary agendas all over the world – with a particular focus on **Portuguese-Speaking African Countries**. The ultimate goal is to ensure concrete progress following the High-Level Meeting, with Parliamentarians driving the expansion and improvement of mental healthcare at both national and global levels.

“ UNITE aims to ensure that the global commitments made, and the conclusions drawn from this week’s discussions, are followed through with concrete actions at the national level. Parliamentarians must be at the forefront of expanding access to mental health care and holding governments accountable for progress ” noted **Dr. Guilherme Duarte**, Executive Director of UNITE and former Diplomat in Geneva.

With over 8 years of experience in mobilizing parliamentarians for Global Health issues, and over 520 members across 119 countries, UNITE is uniquely positioned to mobilize high-level policymakers, build cross-sector alliances, and provide evidence-based tools for strengthening national and international mental health responses.

Parliamentarians hold an unique role and responsibility to their constituencies – one that must be leveraged through decisive, collective action.

ABOUT UNITE

UNITE is a non-profit, non-partisan global network of current and former members of parliament from multinational, national, state and regional Parliaments, Congresses, and Senates committed towards the promotion of efficient, sustainable and evidence-based policies for improved global health systems in alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The network currently has over 520 Parliamentarians in 119 countries.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE MENTAL HEALTH POLICY DESK

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