



Mental Health in Liberia

The psychological impact of more than a decade of civil conflict, which ended in 2003, has contributed to a mental health crisis in Liberia that has been intensified by misconceptions, stigma, and the resulting discrimination surrounding mental illnesses.

Since 2010, building on nearly two decades of fostering peace and democracy in Liberia, the Carter Center's Mental Health Program has worked to help create a sustainable mental health system in the country. The initiative has focused on training a mental health workforce, supporting the passage of a national mental health law, assisting Liberia's Ministry of Health in implementing the national mental health policy and plan, reducing stigma, and empowering family caregivers.

Previously, this nation of 4.6 million had one psychiatrist and a handful of mental health nurses to meet the needs of at least 300,000 Liberians suffering from mental illnesses. Now it has three psychiatrists, more than 200 Carter Center-trained mental health clinicians working throughout the country, and an active mental health consumer movement.

Developing Resilience

The most recent aspect of the Carter Center's mental health work in Liberia began in the immediate aftermath of the 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak in Liberia, when The Carter Center began working in Margibi and Montserrado counties to address the psychological effects of the crisis and to promote psychosocial health in the country.

Responding to Immediate Psychosocial Impact of Ebola

The Ebola outbreak exacerbated mental health problems and sharply exposed the impacts of the shortage of mental health care training for health professionals and inadequate supplies of necessary medications.

The Center has responded to the intermediate psychosocial impact of Ebola by educating first responders on self-care and stress relief;



A group of Liberian health professionals celebrate their graduation from an intensive six-month training program that accredits them as mental health clinicians. More than 200 graduates are now working in primary care clinics and hospitals across Liberia.

training health and social workers in the World Health Organization's Mental Health Gap Action Program, family psychoeducation, and psychological first aid; providing mental health services to those impacted by Ebola; conducting community healing dialogues with Ebola-affected communities; and supporting the creation of peer support groups for people with mental illnesses and epilepsy.

Supporting Long-Term Psychosocial Health and Resilience

The Center provides support to building long-term psychosocial health and resilience for individuals and communities, including building systems of care for children and adolescents with social, emotional, and behavioral problems through the training of 100 clinicians specializing in child and adolescent mental health. Graduates work in primary care and school-based clinics and promote positive development through parental and community-based support.

Through the Margibi and Montserrado county health teams, over 10,000 individuals have received mental health and psychosocial services in more than 45 facilities.

Building Additional Supports

Complementing this work, The Carter Center and the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection, and Ministry of Education, and their local counterparts are further developing child and adolescent mental health services. This initiative created and supports seven school-based clinics and increased the number of health and social welfare workers trained to assess, treat, and manage childhood social, emotional, and behavioral problems. It also helps teachers and school administrators learn to identify, support, and refer children and adolescents with social, emotional, and behavioral problems to appropriate professionals, and promote positive development and learning.



Current Carter Center work in Liberia focuses on improving the mental health of children and adolescents in the wake of the recent Ebola crisis.

The Carter Center works with Liberian institutions responsible for ongoing training, policy, and anti-stigma efforts. As a result of the Center's work with its partners, particularly the Liberia Board of Nursing and Midwifery and the Liberia National Physician Assistants Association, mental health training will be fully integrated into Liberia's national curriculum for nursing and physician assistant schools, and the training of a specialized mental health workforce will be led by Liberia's Ministry of Health.

Making a Long-Term Impact

The work of The Carter Center and its partners is improving the lives of Liberians today and of future generations.

Training a Mental Health Workforce

More than 200 mental health clinicians have graduated from an intensive training program provided by The Carter Center and its partners, and more than 60 of those clinicians specialize in treating children and adolescents. These accredited clinicians now work throughout the country in all sectors of health service delivery, and each of Liberia's 15 counties has at least four mental health clinicians.

Program alumni are making a lasting impact in their communities by establishing new services, including:

- Creating 14 clinical practices in prison systems
- Training nurse midwives to screen for maternal depression
- Training pre-service nurses and physician assistants in mental health
- Treating refugees from the Cote d'Ivoire conflict
- Supporting peer support groups
- Running community healing dialogues
- Providing psychosocial support to individuals and families including those affected by the Ebola virus

Some alumni also are educators who return to classrooms to ensure the next generation of primary care workers will be better prepared to deliver mental health care. Others lead policy and strategy development and even head up health care institutions associated with such organizations as the World Health Organization, Liberia's Ministry of Health, and SOS Children's Villages.

Assisting with National Policy Development

The Carter Center has provided policy support to the Ministry of Health and its mental health agenda. In 2015, the ministry developed a new five-year policy and strategic plan. The Center was instrumental in facilitating the drafting of a bill for national mental health legislation. The resulting

law was passed in 2017 and protects and promotes the human rights of individuals living with mental illnesses and provides a policy platform for future mental health initiatives.

Furthermore, The Carter Center responded to requests from the Ministry of Health in the 2009 National Mental Health Policy and helped establish the Liberian Center for Outcomes Research in Mental Health, an independent research organization focused on integrating effective interventions into routine mental health care practice, clinical epidemiology, and community-based participatory research and evaluation.

Reducing Stigma

To reduce the stigma associated with mental illnesses and empower family caregivers, The Carter Center has conducted anti-stigma training courses for a wide range of audiences. The Carter Center has trained pharmacists, journalists, law enforcement officers, faith and traditional leaders, and users of mental health services and caregivers on anti-stigma knowledge, attitudes, and practices. Anti-stigma efforts have led to the development of Liberia's first consumer advocacy group, Cultivation for Users' Hope.

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For more information about The Carter Center's Mental Health Program in Liberia, please contact Kate Braband Senior Associate Director of Development kate.braband@cartercenter.org (404) 420-5103

THE
CARTER CENTER



One Copenhill
453 Freedom Parkway
Atlanta, GA 30307
(404) 420-5100
www.cartercenter.org

