

OUR CORE VALUES:

- Recognition of diversity
- Confidentiality
- Compassion
- Equal treatment
- Professionalism
- Teamwork



# MENTAL HEALTH AUTHORITY

25<sup>th</sup> June 2024

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To All Media Houses

## PRESS RELEASE FROM THE MENTAL HEALTH AUTHORITY INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST DRUG ABUSE AND ILLICIT TRAFFICKING, 26TH JUNE, 2024

The International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking will be observed globally on Wednesday, 26<sup>th</sup> June 2024. In alignment with this year's theme, "***The Evidence is Clear: Invest in Prevention***", the Mental Health Authority of Ghana reaffirms its unwavering commitment to addressing the pervasive challenges and devastating effects of drug abuse and illicit trafficking through promoting evidence-based preventive measures. This year's theme highlights the critical importance of preventative strategies in mitigating the widespread impact of drug abuse.

### Understanding Drug Abuse

Drug abuse, defined as the excessive and harmful use of psychoactive substances including alcohol, illicit drugs like cannabis, heroin, cocaine among others, and prescription medications like tramadol and other opiates and opioids, leading to addiction, health complications, and social dysfunction remains a significant public health concern that transcends socio-economic barriers, affecting individuals, families, and communities alike.

The key causes of drug abuse include socio-economic stressors, response to trauma, peer influence, and mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety. Indicators of drug abuse include; increased rate of intoxication or hangovers, changes in one's behavior, personality, or social conduct, neglect of responsibilities while prioritising the drug of choice, involvement in criminal activities like theft or fraud in order to fund the addiction, secretive behavior, frequent lying, and friction in relationships.

Effective prevention and intervention strategies are critical to mitigating these underlying factors and curbing the spread of addiction and substance use disorders.

### The Situation in Ghana:

Ghana faces a growing challenge with drug abuse especially among the youth, which undermines public health, safety, and socio-economic development. Recent trends indicate a consistent rise in drug-related incidents and health crises, underscoring the urgent need for robust preventive efforts and intervention strategies.

Data from the District Health Information Management System (DHIMS) has consistently captured mental disorders due to alcohol and other psychoactive disorders among the

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top ten (10) causes of mental health outpatient (OPD) attendance. In 2023, a total of 3,765 cases of mental disorders due to alcohol use were attended to, and 5,554 cases with respect to other psychoactive substance use.

The 5-year trend of mental disorders due to psychoactive substance use has shown a steady rise in the number of cases from 4,155 in 2019 to 5,554 cases in 2023, with the age range most affected being 20-34 yrs. It must be noted that children as young as 10-14 years are also presenting with conditions stemming from drug use.

### **Efforts by the Mental Health Authority:**

The Mental Health Authority of Ghana has partnered key stakeholders in the fight against drug abuse through various initiatives such as;

1. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** The Authority has undergone several nationwide campaigns leveraging traditional media, community outreach programs, and social media to educate the public on the dangers of drug abuse reaching a broad audience, and hopes to do more in the future. By disseminating accurate information, we aim to reduce stigma and encourage individuals to seek help.
2. **Youth and School-Based Programmes:** Recognising the vulnerability of the youth to drug abuse, the Authority has embarked on several drug prevention advocacy drives in schools across the country in collaboration with teachers and school counselors to educate and foster a supportive environment for students. These programs aim to educate young people in communities about the risks of drug abuse and promote healthy, drug-free lifestyles.
3. **Rehabilitation and Support Services:** The Mental Health Authority through its facilities namely Pantang Hospital, Accra Psychiatric Hospital and Ankaful Psychiatric Hospital, provides essential services such as counselling, detoxification, and rehabilitation services to individuals being managed for drug addiction. Beyond these, similar services are provided in other governmental and private accredited health facilities. The Authority's toll-free helpline (**0800 678 678**), is a ready support for individuals requiring urgent attention.
4. **Policy Advocacy:** The Authority has been instrumental in advocating for stronger drug control policies and legislation that prioritizes prevention and treatment over punitive measures. The passage of the Narcotic Control Commission Act in 2023 is a significant milestone in creating a health-centered approach to drug issues.

### **The Way Forward:**

As we commemorate this year's International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, it is crucial to reflect on the progress made and to recognise the work that remains. Moving forward, the Mental Health Authority of Ghana is committed to:

1. Strengthening prevention efforts including expanding public education campaigns, enhancing school-based interventions, and providing more resources for community-based initiatives.
2. Improving access to treatment by increasing the capacity of rehabilitation centres as well as decentralizing and integrating mental health services into primary healthcare.
3. Fostering multidisciplinary collaboration by implementing a coordinated effort across multiple sectors, including health, education, law enforcement, social services and non-governmental organizations to develop holistic and sustainable solutions.
4. Empowering communities by engaging closely with local leaders, civil society organizations, and community members to develop tailored interventions that address the specific needs of different communities.

**Call to Action:**

On this International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, the Mental Health Authority of Ghana calls on all stakeholders —government agencies, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, media, and the general public to join in this critical effort to combat drug abuse by investing in prevention.

By joining forces to implement a people-centered approach to drug policies, with a focus on human rights, empathy, compassion, evidence-based practices, and devoid of judgment and discrimination, we can protect the health and well-being of our citizens and build a healthier, drug-free future for all Ghanaians. The evidence is clear: investing in prevention not only reduces the incidence of drug abuse but also strengthens community well-being and safeguards our collective future.

Thank you.



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