Dear Colleagues,

The International Alliance of Mental Health Research Funders remains the only global forum in which a diverse group of major mental health research funders can exchange wisdom and coordinate efforts to make a real difference in the lives of patients and families. The success of the IAMHRF is based on the engaged participation of key players around the world and the harmonization of efforts beyond national borders. Its specific goal is to seize transformational opportunities for the mental health research sector to develop effective new treatments and interventions. Over the years, this group’s collaboration has deepened, fostering international efforts to achieve changes in the sector that no individual funder could accomplish on their own.

With this annual briefing note, we offer you an update on the IAMHRF’s membership and scope and highlight some of its accomplishments in 2019. The forum is now in its 10th year and we proudly look back on our achievements and delivery on many of the objectives we set out in 2009. We will summarize the forum’s most important collaborations, including emerging data harmonization efforts and the launch of a first global scoping study of mental health research funding. In addition, we include a snapshot of new members and current governance along with a summary of the IAMHRF’s financial information.

Membership

In the ten years since its founding, the IAMHRF has matured from a small group to a truly global alliance encompassing many of the world’s biggest and most innovative funders of mental health research. We see our relevance and added value confirmed by the continued participation and engagement of major government funders that are largely responsible for priority setting and the development of national research programs. The breadth of membership continued to grow in 2019 with a notable increase in participation from philanthropic foundations and fundraising charities. We are also delighted to welcome member organizations that are based and fund in low- and middle-income countries, a significant step to fulfill our mandate to contribute to a more equitable and globally relevant research agenda.
We were pleased to welcome the following organizations that joined us as full members in 2019:

AIM Youth Mental Health (USA)
Mariwala Health Initiative (India)
One Mind (USA)
Raintree Foundation (India)
Trygfonden (Denmark)

The IAMHRF now counts a total of 21 financially contributing (full) members and 27 partner organizations.
Governance

We would like to thank our colleagues from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, National Institute of Mental Health, Tata Trusts, Wellcome Trust, and ZonMw who served on the IAMHRF Steering Committee (ISC) in 2019. Their contributions have been invaluable to set timely and relevant priorities for the annual meeting and related activities and to ensure that the forum’s leadership is fair and well distributed. With its steady growth in size and scope, there has been an increasing need to develop a more formalized governance structure for the IAMHRF. On July 3, 2019, the ISC adopted a formal set of Terms of Reference that lay out the IAMHRF’s goals and activities, leadership provided through the ISC, and expectations for members including financial engagement and other contributions. The Terms of Reference can be downloaded from the IAMHRF website at http://iamhrf.org.

Annual Meeting

The Wellcome Trust graciously hosted the IAMHRF’s 2019 annual meeting on April 29-30 in London, UK. A total of 26 funding organizations, represented by more than 60 thought leaders, attended the gathering. Discussions focused on how the collective of funders could catalyze the use of research standards and harmonized measures in mental health research, paying heed to the global movement for Open Science. Moved by a desire to take a more active role in advancing common goals, those in attendance organized themselves into four working groups for more focused collaboration.

Working Groups

The formation of specialized working groups is the result of multi-year reflections by members of the forum on what the collective of mental health research funders should focus on to achieve the highest possible impact. The following four topic areas were identified as particularly relevant and well-suited to being addressed by the IAMHRF:

- **Data harmonization**: To drive international coordination of data architecture and to increase the adoption of shared data models;
- **Systematic involvement of people with lived and living experience**: To understand the impact and to develop principles and best practices at all levels of the research enterprise including funded research and institutional structures;
- **Utilizing all global mental health research potential**: To identify thought leaders and engage more research funding organizations that are based in and fund in low- and middle-income countries;
- **Mobilizing funds for mental health research**: To develop a broader public movement to attract more funds and convert important resources from philanthropists and gift givers to mental health research.

Each of the groups has been chaired by a research funder with a strong interest in the topic to mobilize additional funders to take part in the effort and to develop an action plan. Working groups are expected to provide an update to the forum at the 2020 annual meeting.

First results have emerged from the data harmonization group composed of about 10 research funders and chaired by the National Institute of Mental Health. The group set out on the premise that data aggregation related to mental illness, enabled by standardized data models, is necessary to understand and treat those conditions. A first set of harmonized demographic data collection instruments has advanced over the last few months and is currently being prepared for input from diverse research.
communities in countries around the world. All central processes revolving around the collection of feedback on standards and creation of a panel for final decision-making are administered through the IAMHRF secretariat. It should be noted that the group will be developing a plan for broad dissemination and uptake of newly introduced standards which will involve the publishing sector as a partner.

Global Research Funding Landscape Study

In late 2019, the IAMHRF launched a project to establish a baseline for investments in mental health research around the globe. Currently, no information exists as to how much is spent on mental health research, what the main sources of funding are, what goes into different disease areas and which types of research (from basic biomedical to service design) are funded. Therefore, to better inform the direction of further investments, priority setting, and policy making in various contexts, we need to understand where and how the funds are currently spent. The IAMHRF is well placed to fill this gap and has begun a scoping exercise to determine how much is spent and where there may be underexplored opportunities. This first iteration is meant as a starting point from which future studies will show the evolution of research funding in this area.

Inspired by MQ’s successful mapping of UK funding for mental health research, the IAMHRF is working with data experts and Digital Science, a company which holds a large repository of grant information. We have also convened an advisory committee with representation from six major funding regions around the globe, as identified in Project Ecosystem. To improve data coverage for the study, we sent out a Call for Participation in early January 2020, which many members kindly responded to and passed on to other organizations whose data may be useful. The next steps are to begin to analyze funding data and produce a report of the study’s findings.

Participation in Global Initiatives

Over the last few years, the mental health sector has gained more attention with respect to gaps related to stigma and advocacy, effective services and treatment, as well as research and innovation. There are now a number of international initiatives underway to discuss these issues on a global scale and to offer support and solutions. For the IAMHRF to be an effective player in the mental health ecosystem and to leverage emerging efforts, it is important that the forum is well informed about leading advocacy and policy developments and that its efforts are complementary to those of other players.

Within the context of its global network, the IAMHRF has built relationships with key organizations and initiatives that address critical needs in the mental health and broader research sectors. In 2019, the IAMHRF built close links with Wellcome Trust’s new Mental Health Priority Area, the World Economic Forum, United for Global Mental Health, the Healthy Brains Financing Initiative and the EViR research funders’ forum, to name just a few.

Looking Ahead

- The beginning of 2020 has been marked by the worldwide outbreak of COVID-19. For the safety of everyone involved, the next annual meeting of IAMHRF members will be postponed to October later this year and will take place in Mumbai. The event will be organized in partnership with Tata Trusts. The agenda centers around global cooperation in mental health research, with a special focus on the Global South.
The IAMHRF is making efforts to expand the capacity of its [website](#) in order to support working groups’ evolving needs.

**Financials**

The following table provides a summary of the IAMHRF’s member contributions and expenditures for 2019 (January 1st to December 31st, 2019; all amounts in Canadian dollars).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTRIBUTIONS RECEIVED:</th>
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<td>Private foundations and charities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Government research funders</td>
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<td><strong>Total contributions</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>124,790</strong></td>
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<th>EXPENDITURES:</th>
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<td><strong>COMMUNICATION &amp; PROFESSIONAL FEES</strong></td>
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<td><strong>EVENTS &amp; MISCELLANEOUS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total expenditures</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>124,790</strong></td>
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Overhead charges funded separately by Graham Boeckh Foundation

*CDN to US average 0.76 Jan 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019