

Mental health disorder is the unspoken pandemic of modern life

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Broad research shows that although the global annual spending on leadership development averages \$45bn, the resulting ROI is only 2%. Why do we continue spending so much on leadership training and development? Because humans are wired to believe that success depends only on what you can do rather than who you are as a whole. The pandemic proved that no matter how good a leader you may appear to be, your state of being matters far more. When your mental health is out of balance, your performance at work suffers greatly.



[The World Health Organisation \(WHO\)](#) defines mental health as a state of well-being in which every individual realises their potential, can cope with the everyday stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to their community. Mental health disorders can affect anyone regardless of age, gender, race, income level, profession, or demography. Yet, access to quality treatment is still not widely accessible to many, and others are ashamed of being diagnosed. Mental health disorder is the unspoken pandemic of modern life.

Too little investment in mental health

In this uncertain environment, many people – leaders especially – are under pressure to chase targets, tight deadlines, and to do more with less, and many are not coping well. This is leading to a second pandemic where more and more people are working to the point of mental breakdown. We are seeing the number of patient days increasing as people admit themselves into facilities because of mental health problems.

Unfortunately, even today, mental health remains at the very bottom of healthcare spending priorities. [Research](#) by the University of Cape Town highlights that South Africa spends 5% of the total health budget on mental health services. This aligns with the lower end of [international benchmarks](#) of the recommended amount countries should spend on mental health. At the provincial level, the numbers are also unbalanced. In Mpumalanga, spending on mental health per uninsured South African was R58.50, while in the Western Cape, it was R307.40. Even more alarming, it is estimated that there exists

a treatment gap of 92%. This means fewer than one in 10 people living with a mental health condition in South Africa receive the care they need.

Furthermore, mental health patients were admitted for twice as long as other patients at district hospitals. Admissions at central, regional and tertiary hospitals lasted six to eight times longer. Despite this long time in care, almost one in four mental health patients were readmitted within three months of being discharged from any hospital. This highlights not only the inefficiencies in spending but also questions the quality of care.

Quality mental health coverage can be affordable

The current picture may look bleak, but there are excellent reasons for hope. Funding access to quality mental health services for all is financially achievable. Each of Medshield's nine medical aid benefit options has a liberal Mental Health In-Hospital benefit. Depending on the benefit option chosen, the Out-of-Hospital Mental Health benefits either accumulate to an ample Chronic Medicine benefit or are option specific.

Medshield provides its members with education and information when they join the Scheme's Disease Management Programme. A care manager trained to provide members with the specific support they require is assigned to the member to review their treatment plan and provide practical and professional advice on improving their quality of life.

There is no need to try to manage your mental health disorder on your own – you are sure to find one of the Medshield Benefit options that will suit your pocket. With the additional assistance provided through the relevant Disease Management Programme, you will soon love life once again.

Here are some practical steps to take before you get to the point of needing medical treatment:

- **Take breaks from what you are doing** – Take a deep breath and imagine yourself in a peaceful place. Think about something that makes you happy. Laugh! Go outside for a walk and enjoy the fresh air.
- **Check-in with yourself** – How am I feeling? Do I feel like myself? Am I taking care of myself? Am I feeling easily frustrated? Am I staying connected with others?
- **Take small steps at a time** – Breaking things down into smaller pieces can help. Take pride in your smaller tasks, journal your thoughts and feelings and unplug from social media.
- **Support your mental, emotional, and physical health** – Be kind to yourself! Ask for help rather than turning to alcohol or other substances to relieve stress. Create a routine that includes time for exercise, rest and sleep.

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