

PRESS RELEASE

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Virgin Islands Advances Mental Health Framework Through Policy Review

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The Government of the Virgin Islands has taken another significant step toward strengthening mental healthcare with the launch of a comprehensive review of the Territory's mental health legislation and policy framework.

Led by the Ministry of Health and Social Development with technical support from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the review will guide the development of a modern, rights-based Mental Health Act and Mental Health Policy that reflects international best practices while responding to the unique needs of the Virgin Islands.

The initiative underscores Government's commitment to ensuring that persons living with mental health conditions have access to compassionate, person-centered care delivered within a legislative framework that safeguards their dignity, protects their rights and supports recovery.

Minister for Health and Social Development, Honourable Vincent O. Wheatley, said mental health remains a critical component of overall health and wellbeing.

"Mental health is fundamental to the health and well-being of our people. This review represents an important milestone in ensuring that the Virgin Islands has a modern legislative and policy framework that protects the rights and dignity of persons living with mental health conditions while supporting accessible, high-quality and person-centered mental health services."

Honourable Wheatley said the Government remains committed to building a mental health system that responds to the changing needs of the Territory while ensuring services remain accessible, inclusive and aligned with international standards.

"We value PAHO's continued partnership and the expertise of the technical team supporting this work. Their recommendations will guide amendments to the Mental Health Act and the completion of a comprehensive Mental Health Policy that reflects the needs and priorities of the Virgin Islands."

The technical mission is being coordinated by Ms. Katrina Smith, Country Programme Specialist with the PAHO/WHO Office for Barbados and the Eastern

Caribbean Countries with responsibility for the Virgin Islands, together with internationally recognised mental health law and policy experts Dr. Soumitra Pathare, Dr. Arjun Kapoor and Ms. Ramya Pillutia of the Centre for Mental Health Law and Policy, India.

Consultations include representatives from Government ministries and departments, the BVI Health Services Authority, healthcare professionals, the Attorney General's Chambers, the Judiciary, law enforcement agencies, the education sector, social services, National Health Insurance, the Social Security Board, community and faith-based organisations, youth organisations, including YEP BVI, persons with lived experience, caregivers and other civil society partners.

The review represents the first phase of a broader programme of work that will culminate in proposed amendments to the Mental Health Act and the completion of the Virgin Islands Mental Health Policy. A Mental Health Plan will subsequently be developed to guide implementation and support the continued integration and strengthening of mental health services across the Territory.

The Ministry of Health and Social Development said the review reflects a broader vision of ensuring that mental health receives the same priority as physical health by promoting early intervention, protecting human rights, strengthening community-based care and improving access to quality mental health services for all residents.

The Ministry extends sincere appreciation to PAHO, the Centre for Mental Health Law and Policy, India, and all stakeholders who continue to contribute their expertise and experiences to this important national initiative.

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