

Youth mental wellbeing in Asia-Pacific Region – a case for investing in prevention and promotion

Kuala Lumpur, 22 May 2025 – The Z Zurich Foundation has just released a compelling White Paper that underscores the critical need to support the mental health of young people in the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region. This report highlights the necessity for changes across various areas, from affluent cities to underserved communities, and calls for immediate action at public, private and civil organisation levels.

With over 750 million young people aged 15 to 24 in South Asia, East Asia, and the Pacific, the mental health and wellbeing of youth in the APAC region demand urgent attention.¹ Alarmingly, nearly half of all mental health issues begin by age 14, and suicide is one of leading cause of death among 15 to 29-year-olds in many countries². The cost of inaction is staggering, both in human and economic terms. Research indicates that many mental health conditions start early in life³ and, if left unaddressed, can impact education, employment, and relationships into adulthood⁴.

The APAC region is incredibly diverse in terms of geography, culture, and income levels, presenting both opportunities and challenges for improving youth mental wellbeing. Investing in the prevention of mental health conditions and the promotion of mental wellbeing can yield significant returns. For instance, a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis for adolescent mental health interventions across 36 countries found that each dollar invested yields a return of 23.6⁵. However, mental health often receives less than 1% of health budgets in many parts of the region⁶, while even less goes to mental wellbeing promotion initiatives.

Promotion initiatives aim to create supportive environments that enhance psychological wellbeing by improving emotional literacy and empowering youth with positive coping mechanisms. Prevention focuses on identifying and mitigating risk factors for mental health conditions, addressing determinants to minimise the onset of these conditions for the most vulnerable groups.

This White Paper builds on several effective examples across the region and aims to guide public and private organisations, institutions, policymakers, and civil society on how to best support youth mental wellbeing. All actors play a crucial role in scaling youth mental wellbeing initiatives and bridging the funding gaps. This paper calls for investment in three key areas: cross-sector collaborations, schools that integrate mental wellbeing with learning, and community-based support systems. Promising initiatives include youth-led platforms, sports initiatives, emotional education programs, and blended financing models, which combine the strengths of different sectors to create lasting change.

Working towards a vision of a future where young people's mental wellbeing is supported requires immediate action and long-term commitment. This includes policies focused on prevention, sustainable funding, a trained workforce, and governance that incorporates youth voices from diverse cultural backgrounds. Most importantly, it requires a shift in mindset to recognise youth mental health and wellbeing as essential to societal resilience and economic growth.

Currently, the World Health Assembly 2025 is taking place in Geneva from May 19-27, under the theme "One World for Health." Addressing youth mental wellbeing is a critical topic, as the mental health of young people is foundational to achieving broader health goals. The Assembly provides a platform for global leaders to discuss and commit to actionable strategies that prioritise the mental health of youth, recognising it as a cornerstone for sustainable development and societal resilience.

¹ [Global Annual Results Report 2023: Mental Health | UNICEF](#)

² [World Mental Health Day 2018 Young people and mental health in a changing world](#)

³ [Age at onset of mental disorders worldwide: large-scale meta-analysis of 192 epidemiological studies](#)

⁴ [‘Something needs to change’: Mental health experiences of young autistic adults in England](#)

⁵ [Employment is a critical mental health intervention | Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences | Cambridge Core](#)

⁶ [The global return on investment from preventing and treating adolescent mental disorders and suicide: a modelling study | BMJ Global Health](#)

⁶ [Health at a Glance: Asia/Pacific 2024 | OECD](#)

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“The time for fragmented solutions is over. We must align across sectors, scale proven approaches, build collaborations and invest in systems that put young people at the center. The future of the APAC region depends on it. Together, we can create environments where young people not only survive but thrive,” says Gregory Renand, Head of the Z Zurich Foundation.

“In Malaysia, we’re seeing a growing awareness around youth mental health, but awareness alone isn’t enough. We need to move from conversation to action by investing in early prevention and creating supportive systems that reflect the real needs of young people. This means working with schools, communities and partners to build an environment where mental wellbeing is a shared priority. At Zurich Malaysia, we believe in caring for what matters, and that means supporting our youth today, to create a healthier, more resilient tomorrow,” said Erin Hwang, Head of Brand Marketing and Communications at Zurich Malaysia.

Download the White Paper [“The state of youth mental wellbeing in the Asia Pacific region – A case for investing in prevention and promotion”](#) on the Zurich Malaysia website.

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Notes to editor:

About the Z Zurich Foundation

The Z Zurich Foundation is a Swiss-based charitable foundation established by members of the Zurich Insurance Group. It is the main vehicle by which Zurich Insurance Group delivers on its global community investment strategy.

At the Z Zurich Foundation, we believe in a world where young people have the tools and resources to improve their mental wellbeing. Throughout the 30+ programs we support globally, we aim to create a mental wellbeing movement that is helping young people see their feelings for what they are, so they can prevent stress from developing into anxiety.

According to [Prospira Global's Power of Giving 2024 report](#), the Z Zurich Foundation ranks third in the annual list of the top reported global philanthropic funders focusing on mental health. The Z Zurich Foundation works alongside Zurich Insurance Group employees and other stakeholders as well as with governments and NGOs in pursuit of a future where people can thrive in the face of increasing climate hazards, where those of us feeling the stresses of life are empowered to speak up, and where the marginalized in our society can reach their full potential.

Visit the Z Zurich Foundation's website to learn more about its work: <https://zurich.foundation>. Follow the Z Zurich Foundation on [LinkedIn](#), [X/Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

About Zurich Malaysia

Zurich Malaysia is a collective reference term for the Zurich Insurance Group (Zurich) business subsidiaries operating in Malaysia: Zurich General Insurance Malaysia Berhad, Zurich Life Insurance Malaysia Berhad, Zurich General Takaful Malaysia Berhad and Zurich Takaful Malaysia Berhad. Zurich Malaysia offers a broad range of comprehensive insurance and takaful solutions; helping individuals as well as business owners understand and protect themselves, their businesses and their assets from risk. Zurich Malaysia has an integrated branch network in major cities nationwide as well as dedicated agency and distribution channels nationwide to serve the needs of its customers. For further information on Zurich Malaysia, visit <http://www.zurich.com.my>.

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