



ICAO developments in Mental Health

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**INTERNATIONAL
CIVIL AVIATION
ORGANIZATION**



Global mental health in 2025

Mental health conditions are widespread, undertreated and under-resourced

WIDESPREAD



Nearly

1 in 7

people globally live with
a mental disorder

UNDERTREATED



71%

of people with psychosis do not
receive mental health services

UNDER-RESOURCED

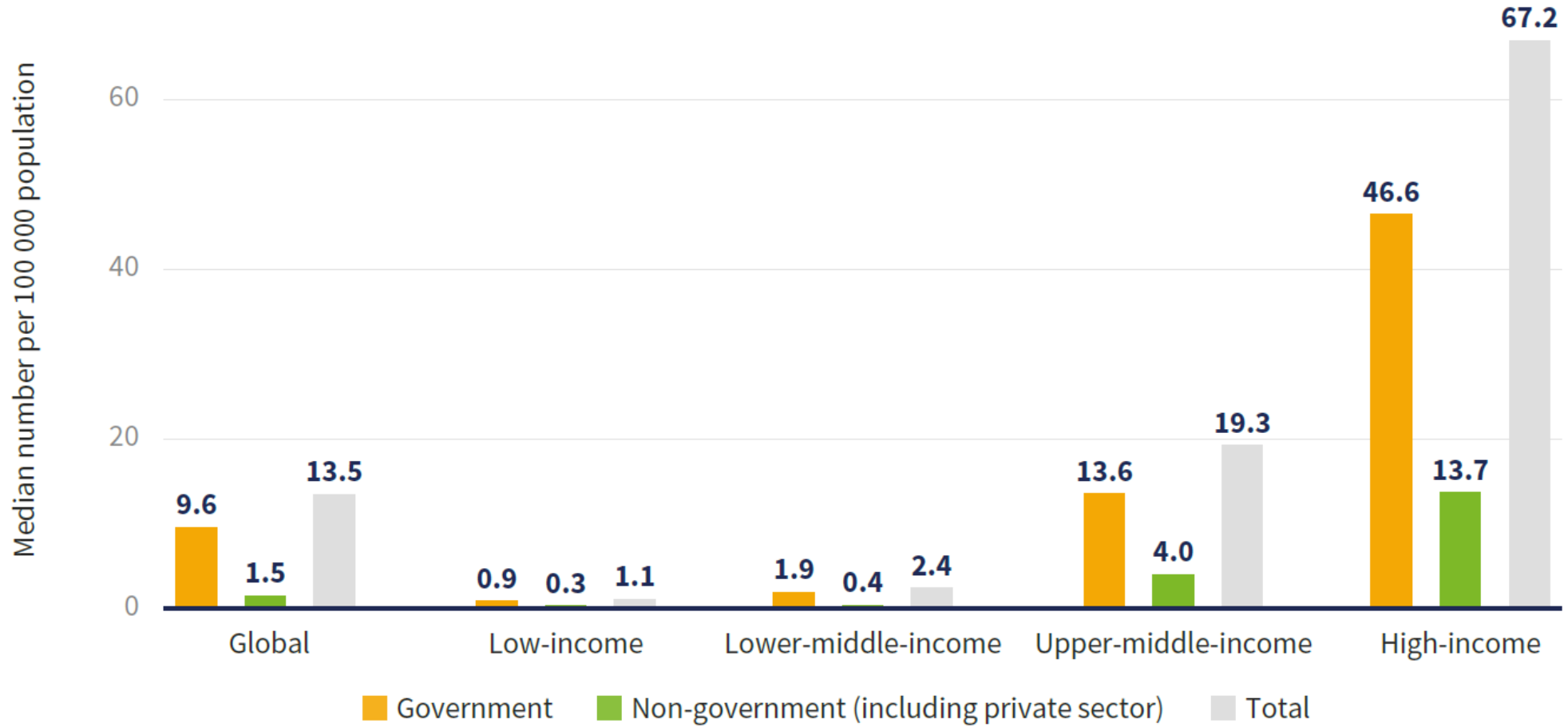


1.4%

of less of health budgets in LMICs,
on average, go to mental health

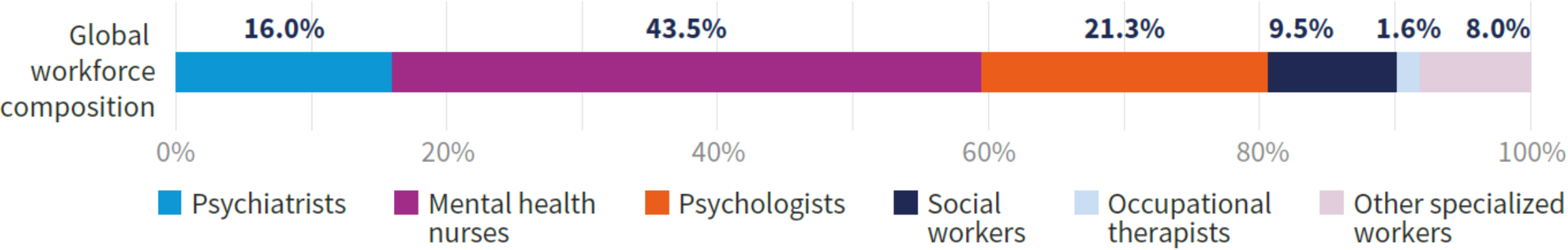
Source: IHME, 2024 (3, 4); WHO, 2025 (2).

The specialized mental health workforce



Source: WHO, 2025 (2).

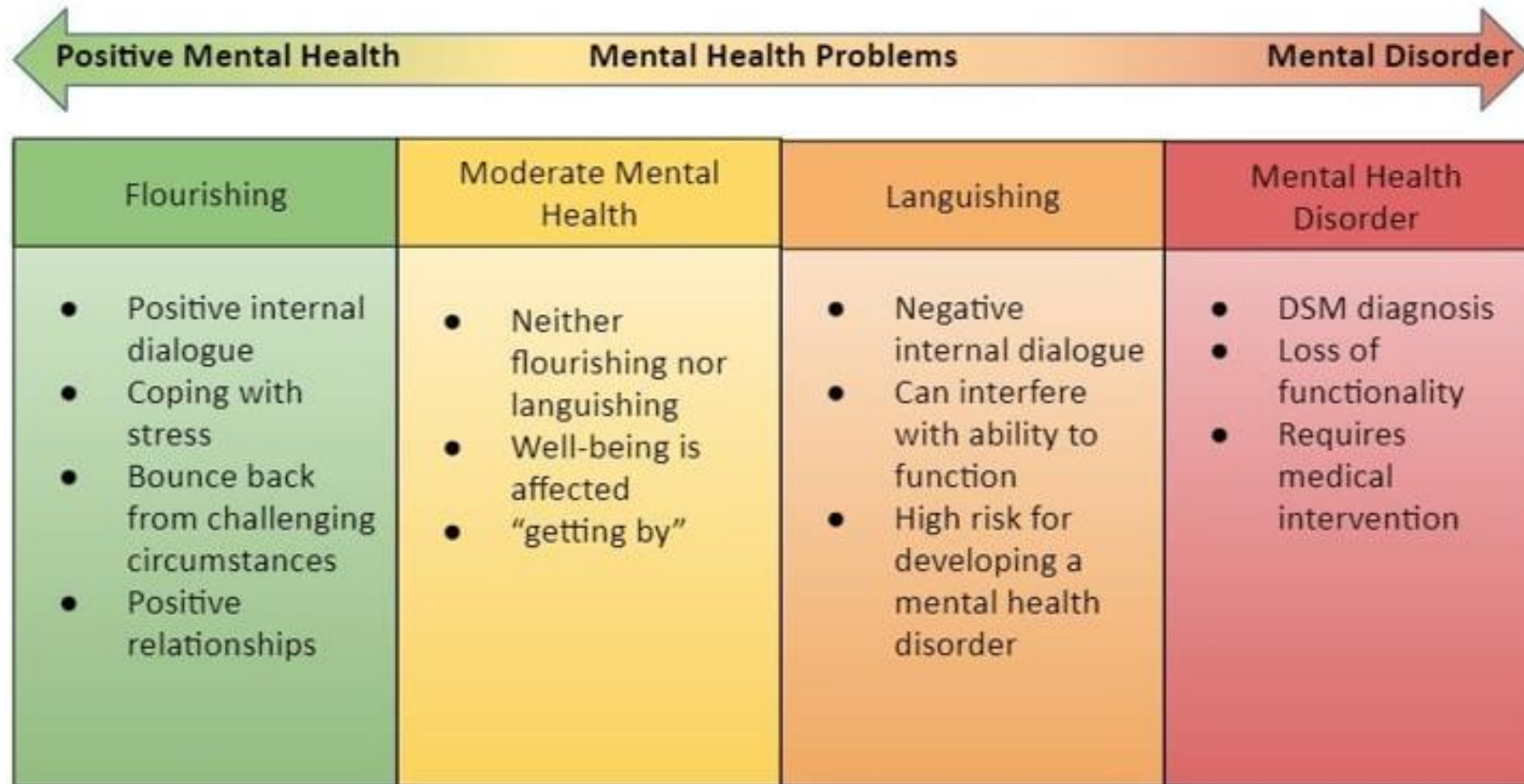
The specialized mental health workforce



Source: WHO, 2025 (2).

Understanding mental health

- Exists on a complex continuum
- Experienced differently from one person to the next



Mental health terminology considerations

- Differentiate between well-being, resilience and pathology
- Applicable to aviation
- Aligned to other areas and terms in aviation
- Start with existing terminology in ICAO
- Consistent use across all ICAO publications

WHO definitions

- **Mental health**

- A state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, to realize their abilities, to learn well and work well, and to contribute to their communities.
- An integral component of health and well-being and is more than the absence of mental disorder

- **Mental health conditions**

- Include diagnosable mental disorders such as psychosis and depression, psychosocial disabilities
- as well as other mental states associated with significant distress, impairment in functioning, or risk of self-harm

WHO definitions

- **Substance use**

- The harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs
- It can impact health and well-being in many ways, including by undermining mental health and brain functioning
- Preventing and reducing the negative impact of substance use extends to and beyond mental and brain health

- **Substance use conditions**

- Include disorders due to psychoactive substance use
- as well as hazardous and harmful use of alcohol, psychoactive drugs or other substances

WHO definitions

- **Mental health, neurological and substance use (M N S) conditions**
 - A constellation of health conditions and disorders that compromise mental or brain health and functioning and may lead to cognitive, intellectual, psychosocial or physical impairment
 - Includes mental, behavioural and neuro-developmental disorders and diseases of the nervous system that are defined in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11)
- **Mental health and psychosocial support (M H P S S)**
 - A composite term for any local or external support aimed at protecting or promoting psychosocial well-being
 - or preventing and treating mental health conditions

WHO definitions

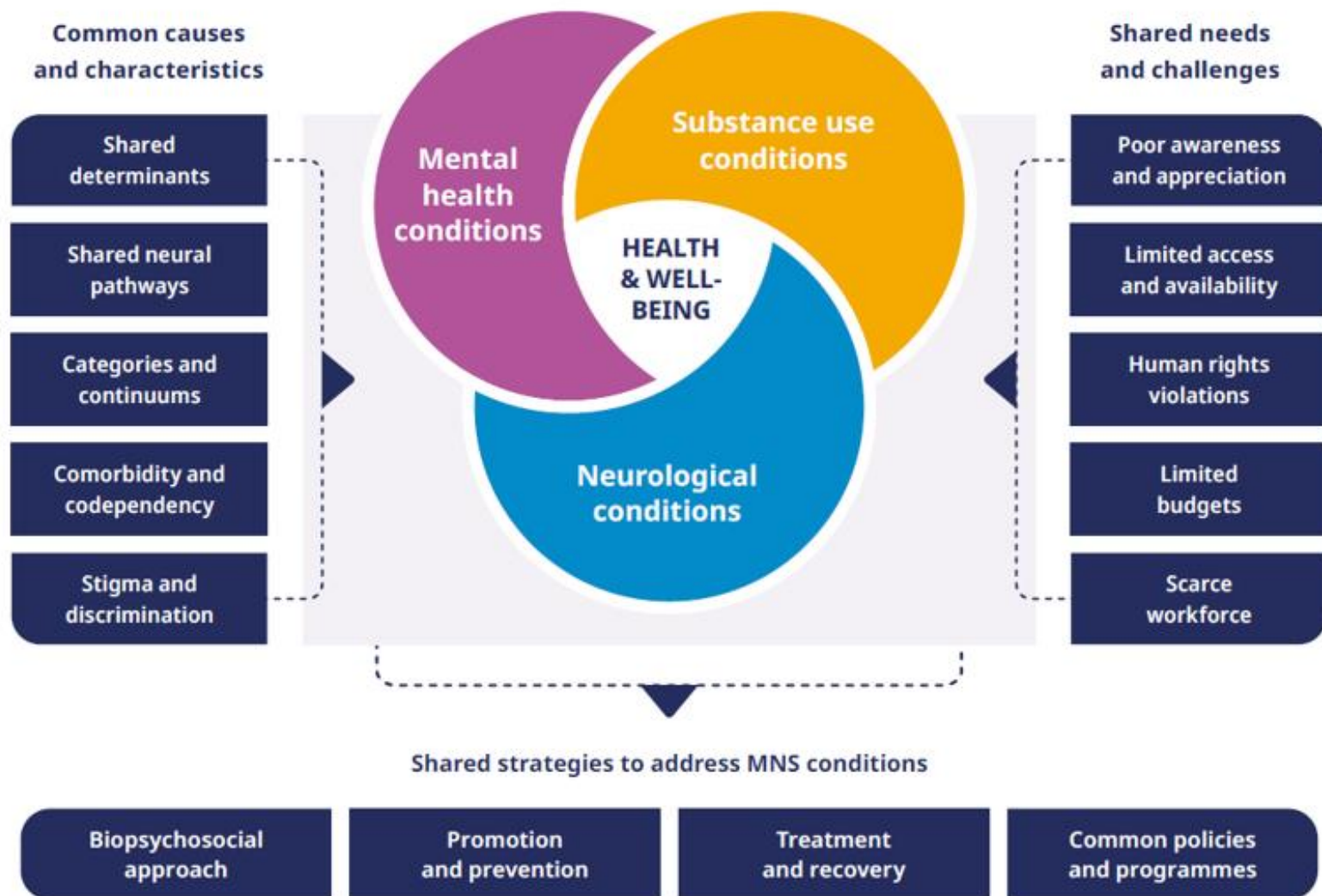
- **Brain health**

- The state of brain functioning across cognitive, sensory, social-emotional, behavioural and motor domains,
- allowing a person to realize their full potential over the life course,
- irrespective of the presence or absence of disorders

- **WHO and Peer support**

- While evidence for the success of peer support programmes remains difficult to evaluate due to the diversity of interventions and outcomes
- there appears to be some indication of short-term benefits

Mental Health

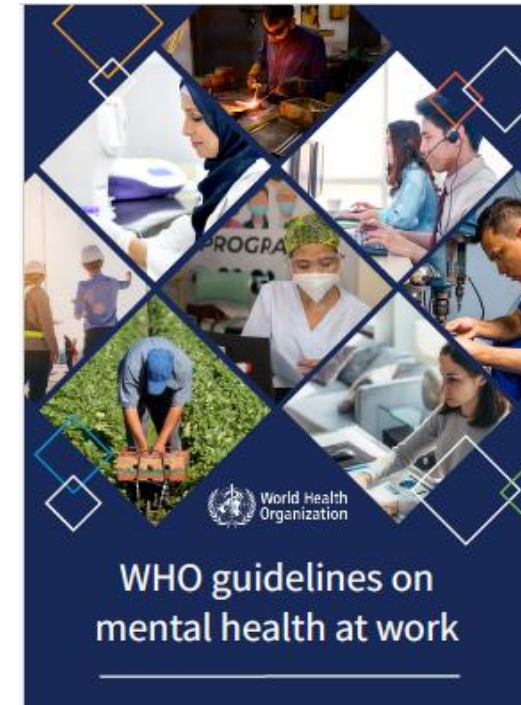


Mental health and work

- Poor mental health affects:
 - cognitive, behavioural, emotional, social and relational well-being and functioning,
 - physical health,
 - personal identity and well-being related to work.
- Capacity to participate in work can be impaired through:
 - a reduction in productivity and performance,
 - reduction in the ability to work safely,
 - difficulty in retaining or gaining work.

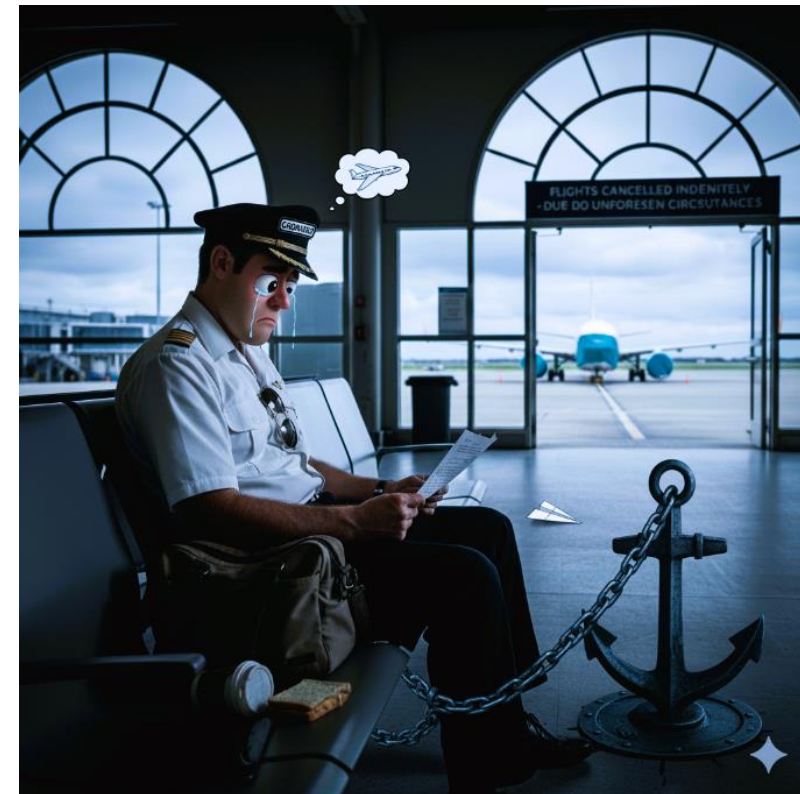
Mental health and work

- An estimated 15% of working-age adults have a mental disorder at any point in time
- Work is a social determinant of mental health and
 - protective for mental health
 - contributes to a person's sense of accomplishment and confidence



Snapshot of mental health in aviation

- Magnitude of mental health problems and disorders in aviation unknown
- Majority of mental disorders: depression, anxiety, alcohol and drug dependence
- Potential certification consequences
 - Additional costs – examinations & treatment
 - Grounding
 - Loss of income
 - Loss of medical certification
 - Loss of employment



Mental health challenges in aviation

- Stigma and discrimination (perceived and real)
- Self-esteem and self-confidence
- Reluctance to seek help
- Seeking help, but declining treatment
- Obtaining treatment, but non-disclosure
- Peers hesitant to report concerns to employer
- Increasing stress and isolation
- Adverse effect on the progression of disease
- Increased risk to aviation safety



Factors affecting mental health in aviation



Mental health in aviation

Key principles



Essential for flight
safety



The aviation environment
is unique and stressful



Multi-stakeholder
collaboration is
essential

Mental health in aviation

Solutions



Advocacy for mental health
Make resources available & accessible
Role of peer support



Build trust relationships
Awareness training
Standardized aviation taxonomy



Risk-based assessment
Harmonized decision-making approach
Data informed and evidence based

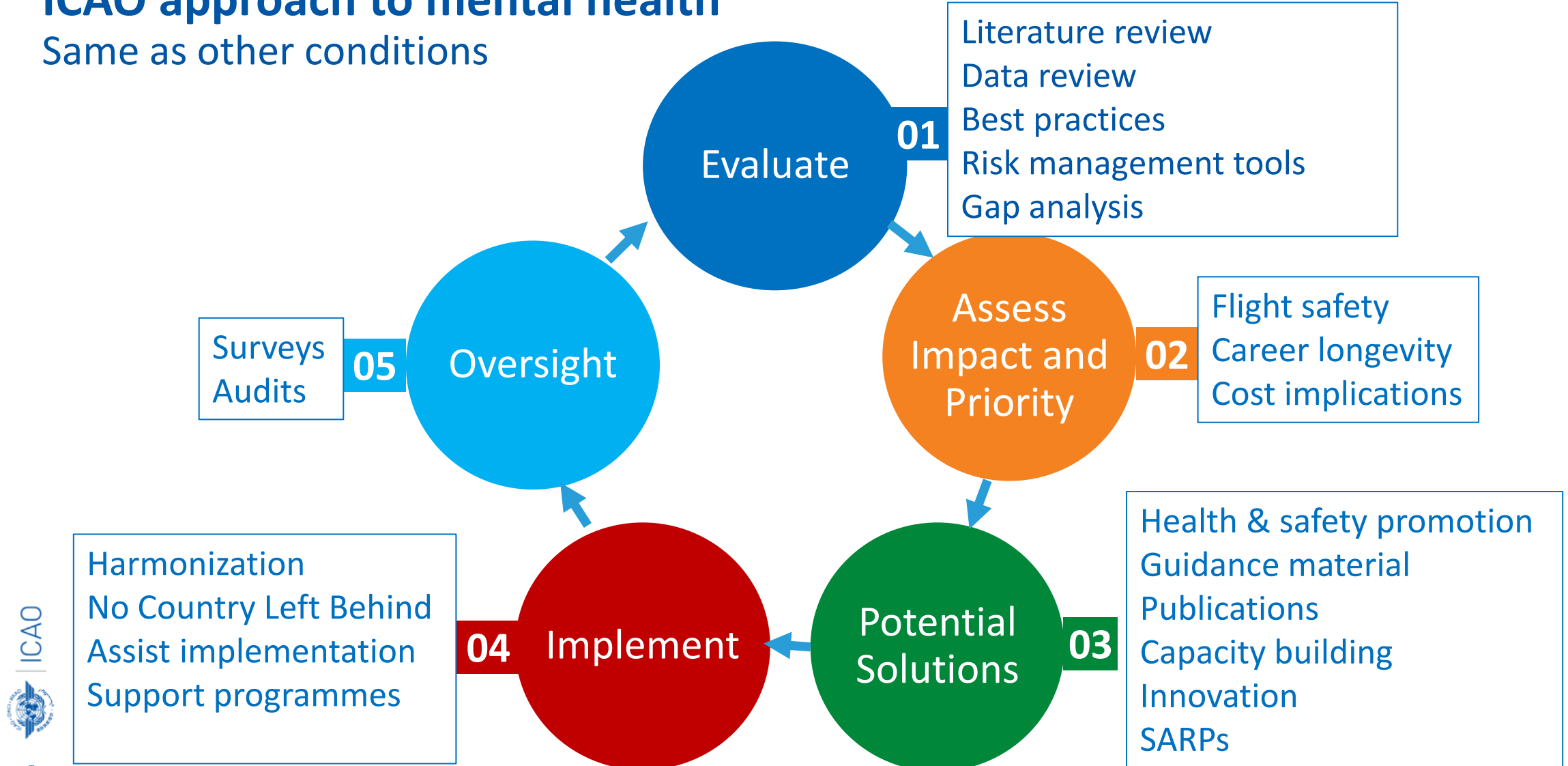
ICAO 2025 Report on the State of Global Aviation Safety

Article: The role of Health Promotion and Mental Wellbeing in Enhancing Aviation Safety

The value of health promotion, mental wellbeing advocacy and the ultimate effective application of individualized risk management should not be underestimated in terms of building trust within the aviation medical system and the resultant effect of enhanced aviation safety

ICAO approach to mental health

Same as other conditions



— Collaboration with Accident Investigation

- ICAO Accident Investigation panel requests:
 - Information as to what can be considered as a **“mental injury”**
 - Whether a concussion would be classified as a **serious or minor injury**
 - Could it be considered as a **brain injury** = **“injury to an internal organ”**
 - What constitutes a **psychological injury**?

— Proposed definition ? Psychological response to an injury

Psychological injury. Assessing the non-physical impact of a stressful or traumatic event on human health is multifactorial and complex. The psychological response to trauma cannot be used to reliably differentiate between an incident, serious incident or aviation accident for reporting purposes in terms of Annex 13 due to the:

- Factors that could have influenced pre-event perception of mental well-being or functioning
- Differences in individual response to stressful or traumatic events
- Potential delays in development of symptoms of mental ill health following such an event
- Challenges conclusively linking the symptoms with a particular event.

— Accident Investigation Panel

Medical Aspects

Actions: The AIGP reviewed and endorsed the following actions:

- Draft a working paper regarding access to medical records (for next AIGP meeting)
- Remind States accidents and incidents involving mental health issues require investigation and that Annex 13 provisions for perceived conflict of interest may be helpful
- Update the Annex 13 definition of Serious Injury to read "A **physical** injury..."
- Draft new guidance material to describe existing and developing policies, procedures, and practices in the area of psychosocial risk management (Doc 9756 Part III)
- Recommend that ICAO undertake the creation of expanded and formalized guidance material for Psychosocial Risk Management

Psychosocial Risk Management in Annex 19 (Safety Management)
Multi-disciplinary Integrated Risk Based Approach (SM Panel)

Thank You

