GOV'T URGED TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY-BASED MENTAL HEALTH CARE

By Joseph Bahingwire

As the world commemorates the International Disability Day under the theme, *Not All Disabilities are Visible*, in a call for stronger action during and after the post-COVID-19 era, the Government has been challenged to prioritise community-based mental health care instead of the institutionalised treatment as has been the norm.

Derrick Kiiza, the executive director, Mental Health Uganda says the COVID-19 pandemic had a great impact on the mental health of many people due to its effects such as restricted movement, loss of jobs and lack of access to medical facilities for those with pre-exiting mental health conditions.

> COVID-19 did not bring new challenges in the mental health care sector but exposed the challenges we already hard because we had not invested well in community mental healthcare.

He says if mental healthcare was at a community level it would have been easier for the people to get treatment and psychosocial support they required.
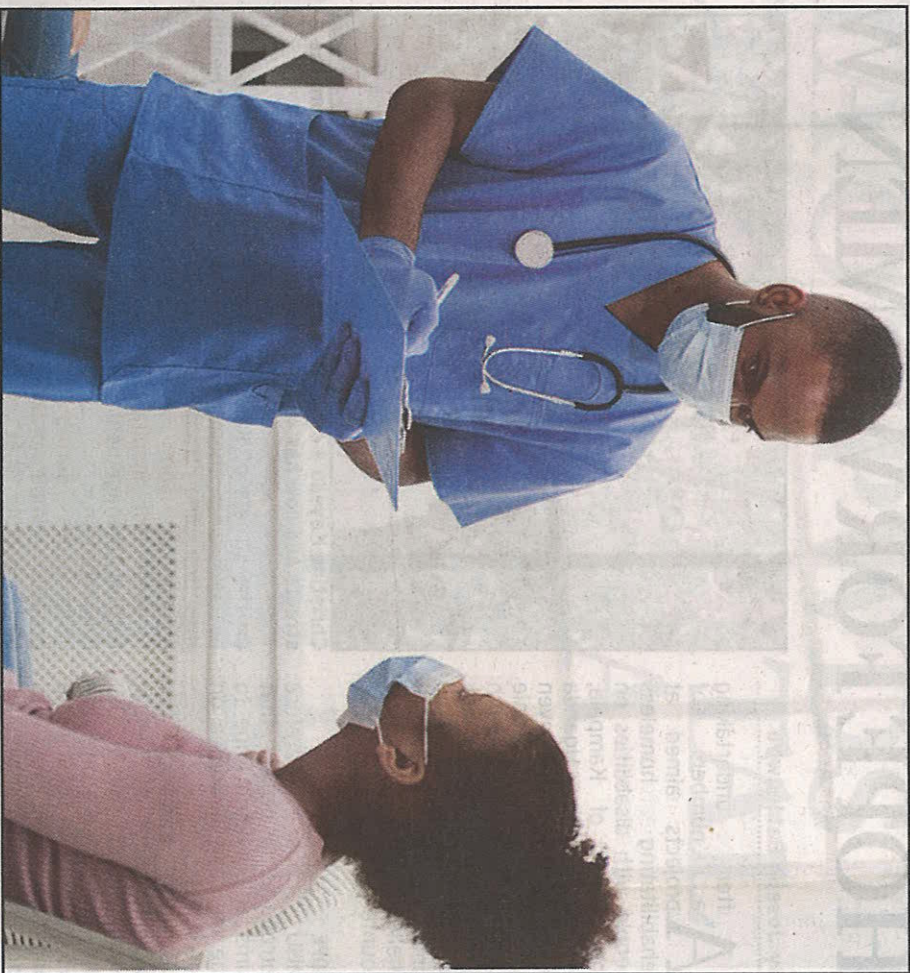
"COVID-19 did not bring new challenges in the mental health patients could no longer be admitted nor access treatment.

He explains that if the Government prioritises and

healthcare and the cost we paid was immense," he says.

Kiiza adds that the situation worsened with the turning of mental treatment units at hospitals into COVID-19 treatment centres as mental health patients could no longer be admitted nor access treatment.

"Such kind of healthcare also helps in early detection and referrals. Its assists in prevention through awareness and can create adherence to

supports community mental health care, it will enable easy access to services by those in need without having to travel long distances to get assistance from institutions such as hospitals.

Kiiza also urged the Government to provide a policy framework to guide the treatment of mental health cases and allocate resources that will empower community

medication by demonstrating that you can treat mental health cases using a community approach in a modern system and not witch doctors," he adds.

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Governments should provide a policy to guide the treatment of mental health cases

health facilities to handle such cases. Information obtained from the Ministry of Heath indicates that mental and behavioural disorders are common, affecting more than 25% of all people at some time during their lives.

According to the World Health Organisation, mental disorders contribute 14% to the global burden of disease.