5. Convening and conversing for mental health through social media

World Health Day 2017 – Depression: Let’s Talk – called for a global dialogue with governments, health professionals, advocates and the public to raise awareness of mental health issues. World Health Day activities encouraged people with depression to seek help, and their families and friends to provide support. A global campaign initiated in 2016 mobilized champions to be advocates for mental health. Various communication channels were employed to promote the theme.

World Health Day events, activities and media coverage were recorded in 23 countries and areas. These included statements of support from high-level government champions, including: the Prime Minister of Samoa; ministers of health from Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Fiji, Kiribati, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea and Tonga; two vice-ministers of health from China and one from Viet Nam; and the Director of Health of Hong Kong SAR (China).

Over 400 television, radio, print and online reports were filed by international and local media outlets. Celebrity champions – broadcaster James Chau from China, actress and singer Sammi Cheng from Hong Kong SAR (China) and Miss International 2016 Kylie Verzosa from the Philippines – used social media to share their personal stories in advocating mental health awareness. Comprehensive national campaigns across various levels of government were also launched in China and the Republic of Korea.

A full range of communication products – micro-videos, public service announcements, interactive applications, short features and infographics – were produced and widely viewed. More than 1.2 million views of the videos and over 90 million social media interactions were recorded. Early mobilization efforts contributed to the campaign’s success.

A regional meeting on strengthening mental health programmes was convened in January 2017 at the Regional Office. Member State representatives shared experiences and best practices in implementing the Regional Agenda for Implementing the Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020 in the Western Pacific. They prioritized next steps in mental health service delivery and developed strategic communication plans that include identifying champions to speak out about overcoming stigma against depression and mental illness.

Intercountry working groups were also convened to facilitate country-to-country learning on school mental health, training and capacity-building, mental health and disasters, scaling up of primary mental health care initiatives and integrated service delivery.