

EU-ASEAN Youth Mental Health Conference Report

20 25

by the ASEAN Youth Mental Health Network

Conference Co-Organisers:



Key Partners:



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Foreword

Elevating Youth Voices: The Imperative for Global Mental Health Advocacy in ASEAN

**Dr Antonis Kousoulis,
Director of Partnerships & Secretariat Lead, Global Mental Health Action Network**

The mental wellbeing of young people in the ASEAN region is a critical determinant of the area's social and economic future, yet it remains severely under-prioritised. A significant majority of youth with mental health conditions cannot access necessary care due to stigma, under-resourced systems, and a lack of culturally appropriate services. This prevention and treatment gap has profound consequences, impacting educational attainment, economic productivity, and overall social cohesion. The region's youth face a unique constellation of challenges, including rapid digitalisation, academic pressure, and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing this silent crisis is not merely a health imperative but a fundamental investment in human capital and sustainable development for all ASEAN nations.

Traditional top-down approaches to mental health have proven insufficient, making global advocacy and genuine youth leadership not just beneficial but essential. Youth involvement ensures that policies and interventions are relevant, accessible, and destigmatising for their peers. The meaningful participation of young people with lived experience in policy making - such as this year for the UN High-Level Meeting on Non-Communicable Diseases and Mental Health - is crucial for creating accountable and effective systems. When young advocates are empowered, they drive innovation, utilise digital platforms for awareness, and hold leaders accountable, thereby transforming mental health from a medical issue into a broader societal priority. Their leadership is the key to breaking down entrenched barriers and building a sustainable movement that resonates across generations.

The path forward requires collective action. To create an ASEAN where every young person can thrive, we must amplify local youth advocacy and integrate it into the global dialogues. The Global Mental Health Action Network provides a vital platform for this collaboration by connecting advocates, organisations, and experts to share resources, advocate for change, and ensure that youth voices from the region are heard on the world stage. By uniting our efforts, we can demand the investment and political will necessary to build a future where good wellbeing is a reality for all ASEAN youth.

Opening Remarks by ASEAN Secretariat



Mr Joel Atienza

Senior Officer of Education Youth and Sports Division
ASEAN Secretariat

The ASEAN Secretariat was pleased to take part in the EU–ASEAN Youth Mental Health Conference 2025, a timely platform that underscored our shared responsibility to support the well-being of young people, especially as we observed World Mental Health Day.

ASEAN is home to over 224 million youth whose holistic development is vital to the region's resilience, prosperity, and inclusivity. Mental health remains a critical priority, and requires coordinated efforts among governments, civil society, educational institutions, and youth networks.

Under the ASEAN Work Plan on Youth 2021–2025, Priority Area 2: Health and Well-Being serves as a framework for advancing youth participation, empowerment, and well-being. Programmes aimed at empowering youth to develop knowledge and promote physical and mental health and well-being, as well as programmes to enhance inter-regional knowledge-sharing and youth empowerment to address the impacts of health emergencies, are among the priorities of the Senior Officials Meeting on Youth (SOMY), which guides the implementation of the ASEAN Work Plan on Youth.

At the Twelfth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Youth (AMMY XII) in 2023, Ministers reaffirmed ASEAN's commitment to youth mental health under Malaysia's theme, "Mental Health Matters: You Are Not Alone." The discussions recognised the diverse and interconnected challenges affecting young people's well-being, including malnutrition, substance use, and the impacts of social media.

Initiatives such as the ASEAN–Japan Youth Forum: Take Actions for Social Change 2024 have also provided meaningful opportunities for young people to engage in projects that promote health, resilience, and community leadership. Looking ahead, ASEAN remains committed to building on these efforts through the upcoming ASEAN Work Plan on Youth 2026–2030, ensuring that mental health and overall well-being remain central to youth development. By deepening cross-sectoral cooperation and partnerships with Dialogue Partners, we can continue to empower ASEAN youth with the skills, knowledge, and support needed to thrive in a rapidly evolving world.

I wish to express appreciation to the European Union, the ASEAN Youth Organisation, and the Youth Sounding Board for the EU in ASEAN for supporting youth-led initiatives such as this conference. Together, we reaffirm our shared commitment to ensuring that every young person knows they are not alone, that their mental health is valued, and that they have access to supportive and empowering opportunities.

Opening Remarks by EU Delegation to ASEAN



Mr Antoine Ripoll

Minister-Counsellor of Parliamentary Affairs
EU Delegation to ASEAN

The EU Delegation to ASEAN is honoured to have joined the ASEAN Youth Organisation and the Youth Sounding Board for the EU in ASEAN in convening the EU-ASEAN Youth Mental Health Conference 2025, in observance of World Mental Health Day.

Mental health has become a pressing global concern and remains a priority for both ASEAN and the European Union. Many young people face growing challenges related to stress, anxiety, and social pressures that affect their daily lives and long-term well-being. This conference provided an important opportunity to exchange experiences and reaffirm our shared commitment to supporting youth mental health.

Within Europe, the EU has placed youth at the centre of its efforts to strengthen mental health and social inclusion. Initiatives such as YOUTHreach, which develops youth-friendly, evidence-based interventions, and MENTALITY, which promotes positive practices and community engagement, demonstrate how young people's participation and creativity are essential to building compassionate and effective approaches to well-being.

The Youth Sounding Board for the EU in ASEAN (YSBEA) reflects this same belief in youth leadership. It brings together young people from across ASEAN to ensure that EU cooperation with the region remains inclusive, participatory, and responsive to youth priorities, including mental health and well-being. Their ideas and energy continue to shape dialogue between Europe and ASEAN, ensuring that cooperation reflects the realities young people face.

Across ASEAN, initiatives such as the ASEAN Youth Mental Health Network embody similar principles. By bringing together youth advocates, mental health professionals, and educators, the network demonstrates how youth-led and multi-sectoral collaboration can drive awareness, build resilience, and promote holistic mental health support.

Looking ahead, the European Union remains committed to promoting open dialogue on mental health, empowering young people to lead change, and fostering environments where every young person can reach their full potential. Through continued collaboration, mutual learning, and shared commitment, the EU and ASEAN can nurture communities that value empathy, resilience, and hope for generations to come.

About the Conference

The EU–ASEAN Youth Mental Health Conference, hosted by the ASEAN Youth Mental Health Network (AYMHN), was a landmark event bringing together young people, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners. Held in conjunction with World Mental Health Day 2025, the conference provided a platform to explore youth mental health in ASEAN, share syntheses of regional evidence, and highlight impactful youth-led initiatives.

Convened online on 10 October 2025, the conference attracted more than 200 participants from all 11 ASEAN countries and beyond. Participants included students, youth advocates, practitioners, researchers, and policymakers. In the lead-up to the event, outreach efforts by AYO reached more than 126,000 users across social media platforms.

The main programme focused on the state of youth mental health in ASEAN, engaging participants in dialogue around regional evidence and policy, and showcasing youth-led innovations responding to emerging mental health needs. Discussions underscored the importance of cross-sector collaboration and the meaningful inclusion of youth voices in shaping mental health responses across the region.

The conference adopted a participatory and co-creative approach, creating space for young people and participants to shape discussions before, during, and after the conference. Feedback from these engagements informed ongoing work, including the refinement of the landscape map and digital knowledge repository.

Insights and outputs from the conference will continue to be discussed with partners and inform the Network's ongoing work and the planning of future initiatives to support youth mental health across the region.

About the Network

The ASEAN Youth Mental Health Network (AYMHN) is a youth-led, multi-stakeholder platform convening advocates, researchers, practitioners, and institutions to strengthen evidence, share practice, and promote policy dialogue on youth mental health in ASEAN. Currently coordinated by the ASEAN Youth Organization (AYO) and the Youth Sounding Board for the EU in ASEAN (YSBEA), the Network is open to all partners committed to advancing youth mental health in the region.

Why we started

Youth mental health represents a critical and growing challenge in ASEAN. In 2021, more than 28 million young people aged 15–34 in the region were living with mental disorders, accounting for over one-third of all prevalent mental disorder cases across age groups.* Since 1990, this burden has increased by approximately 44%, with far-reaching implications for well-being, education, employment, and long-term social and economic development.

Despite this scale, responses across the region remain fragmented. While national policies, research initiatives, and programmes exist, there has been limited regional synthesis of evidence, shared learning across countries, or coordinated platforms that centre youth perspectives. The establishment of AYMHN is informed by regional needs and global calls for action, such as the Lancet Commission on Youth Mental Health, which have highlighted adolescence and young adulthood as critical periods for prevention, early intervention, and systems reform. The Network's work is aligned with global advocacy efforts led by the Global Mental Health Action Network (GMHAN), particularly in advancing youth leadership and lived experience engagement in mental health policy.

How we work

The three workgroups comprise 40+ youths across all 11 countries.

- 1. Country Engagement:** Identify and document organisations in-country, engage local stakeholders, validate data.
- 2. Research and Knowledge:** Analyse and synthesise findings, develop landscape map and typology, draft report, curate resources.
- 3. Communications and Publicity:** Promote the conference, manage registration, engage speakers/partners/audience, design visuals and report.

Projects for 2025

- 01. Data Visualisation:**
Create accessible visuals that present data on youth mental health prevalence and burden.
- 02. Research Synthesis:**
Conduct an umbrella review to map mental health research across ASEAN.
- 03. Practice Mapping:**
Identify and document youth mental health initiatives in ASEAN, especially youth-led projects.
- 04. Knowledge Curation:**
Develop a digital repository of resources from local and regional partners.
- 05. Policy Dialogue:**
Organise a virtual conference and post-event report to promote dialogue and joint action.

*Source: GBD 2021 ASEAN Mental Disorders Collaborators (2025)

About the Conference Co-Organisers



About ASEAN Youth Organization (AYO)

AYO is a youth-led, non-partisan, non-profit organisation that promotes regional solidarity, youth empowerment, and international understanding. With over 11 years of experience and chapters in 18 countries, AYO has delivered over 400 projects impacting more than 3 million youths. Its key initiatives (AYO Enviro, AYO Academy, and the AYO Research Center) focus on environmental advocacy, education, and research. AYO collaborates with governments, civil society, and global institutions to strengthen youth leadership and community development. In 2024, AYO was awarded the ASEAN Prize, the region's premier award for organisations fostering a cohesive and inclusive ASEAN community.



About AYO Research Center (AYO Recent)

AYO Recent is the research arm of AYO, founded in 2021 to elevate youth-led research across ASEAN and ASEAN+ countries. It supports peer learning and mentorship to develop accessible, relevant research on regional social and political issues. The Centre has completed over 10 projects, including a flagship partnership with AMEICC (under Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry), supported the OECD Youth Policy Toolkit, and presented research at COP28 on youth perspectives in ASEAN's energy transition. In 2024, its leadership received the Diana Award for youth-led social impact.



About the EU Delegation to ASEAN

The EU Delegation to ASEAN, established in Jakarta in 2015, is one of over 140 EU diplomatic missions worldwide. It represents the European Union in its partnership with ASEAN, promoting EU policies and positions with ASEAN officials and supporting regional cooperation. EU-ASEAN relations began in 1977 and were elevated to a Strategic Partnership in 2020, underscoring shared commitments to peace, prosperity, and sustainable development.



About the Youth Sounding Board for the European Union in ASEAN (YSBEA)

The YSBEA is a regional platform that brings together young leaders from across Southeast Asia to inform and shape EU engagement in the region. Established by the EU Delegation to ASEAN, YSBEA ensures that youth perspectives are meaningfully integrated into EU programmes, partnerships, and policy dialogues.

Session 1

The State of ASEAN Youth Mental Health

Overview

Session 1 establishes the evidence base for the EU–ASEAN Youth Mental Health Conference. It brings together epidemiological data, research synthesis, and practice-based mapping to develop a shared understanding of youth mental health challenges and responses across ASEAN.

The session consolidates four complementary strands of work developed by the ASEAN Youth Mental Health Network in collaboration with academic, civil society, and institutional partners:

1. Prevalence and burden of youth mental health in ASEAN based on the GBD 2021 study;
2. Umbrella review of mental health research in ASEAN;
3. Regional landscape map of youth mental health initiatives and best practices; and
4. Digital repository of resources.

Consistent with the conference’s participatory and co-creative approach, the outputs presented in Session 1 were part of an ongoing process. Feedback from conference participants has informed subsequent refinement, particularly of the landscape map and digital knowledge repository. As such, the outputs should be read as evolving resources that continue to be strengthened through dialogue and collaboration.

The subsequent pages in this section will provide more information about each strand of work, covering its purpose, how it was developed in collaboration with partners, key insights, and important limitations. Together, this section provides the foundation for future sessions on youth engagement, collaboration, and policy dialogue.

Speakers



Cameron Tan

ASEAN Youth Organization, Director of Research;
Youth Sounding Board for EU in ASEAN



Emma Goh

ASEAN Youth Mental Health Network
Research & Knowledge Team



Mark Hii

ASEAN Youth Mental Health Network
Research & Knowledge Team

1. Youth Mental Disorders in ASEAN (GBD 2021 Findings)

Methodology

We partnered with researchers at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore, and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), University of Washington. We extracted and visualised subset of youth data (15-34 years old) from their recent research article on mental disorders in ASEAN.

Key Findings

Summary from *Global Burden of Disease 2021 ASEAN Mental Disorders Collaborators (2025)*

- Prevalence increased 44% from 1990 to 2021.
- Mental disorders in 2021 affected more than 28 million youth. Youths from 15 to 34 years old account for 35.9% of all prevalent cases in the region.
- Mental disorders in ASEAN youth contributed between 10.57% to 13.65% of disability-adjusted life years (DALYs).

Prevalence of mental disorders among ASEAN youth (15-34 years old) has steadily increased from 1990 to 2021, with all age groups showing growth, particularly those aged 25-34 years.

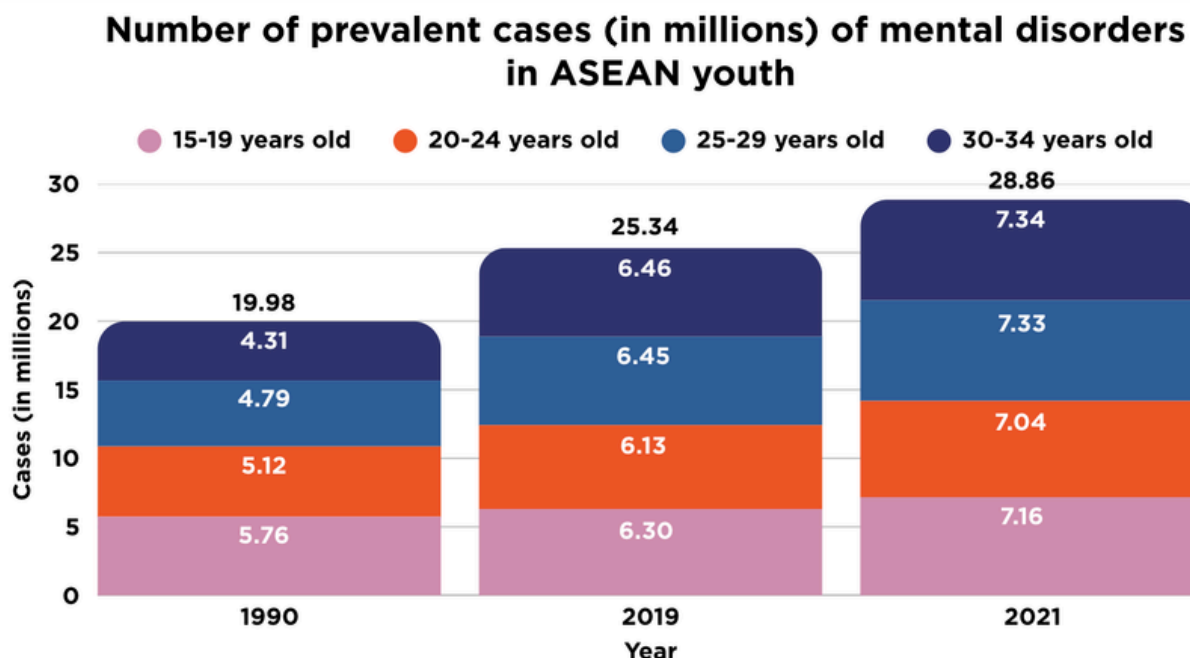


Figure 1: Prevalence across 1990 to 2021 in ASEAN youth (by age group)

Data Source: *GBD 2021 ASEAN Mental Disorders Collaborators. (2025). The epidemiology and burden of ten mental disorders in countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), 1990-2021: Findings from the Global Burden of Disease Study 2021. The Lancet Public Health, 10(6), e480-e491. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(25\)00098-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(25)00098-2)*

Both male and female ASEAN youth (15-34 years old) have seen rising cases of mental disorders since 1990, with consistently higher prevalence among females.

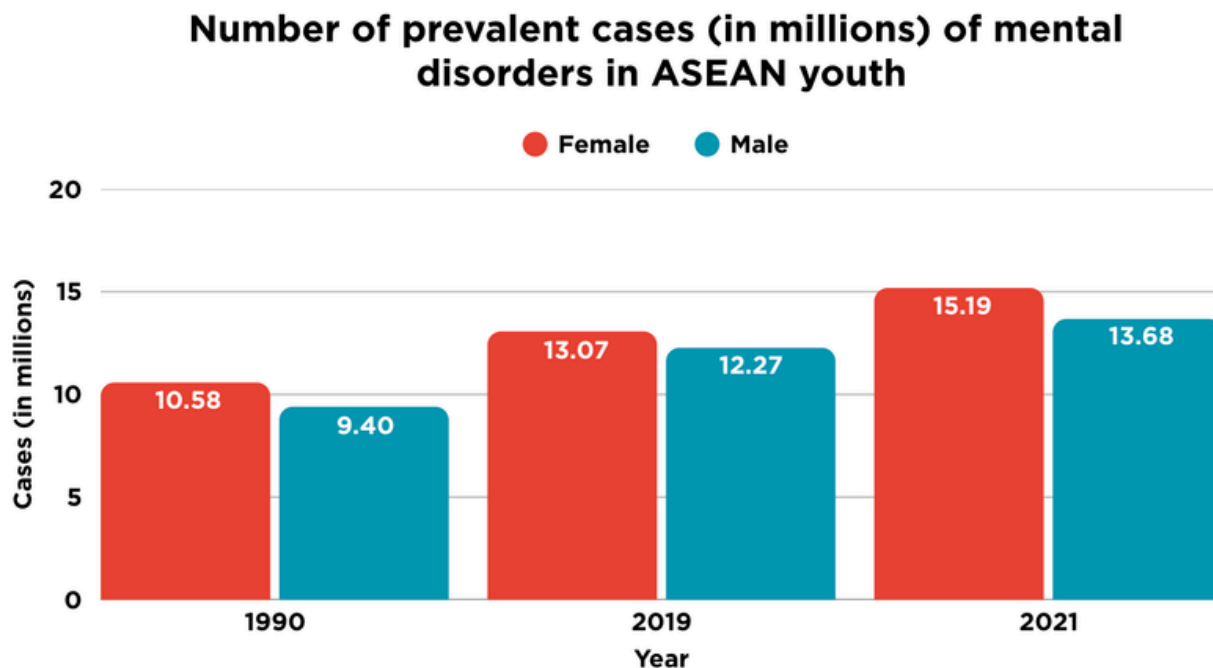


Figure 2: Prevalence across 1990 to 2021 in ASEAN youth (by sex)

Adolescents and youth (10-34 years old) experienced the largest increases in prevalence of mental disorders from 1990-2021.

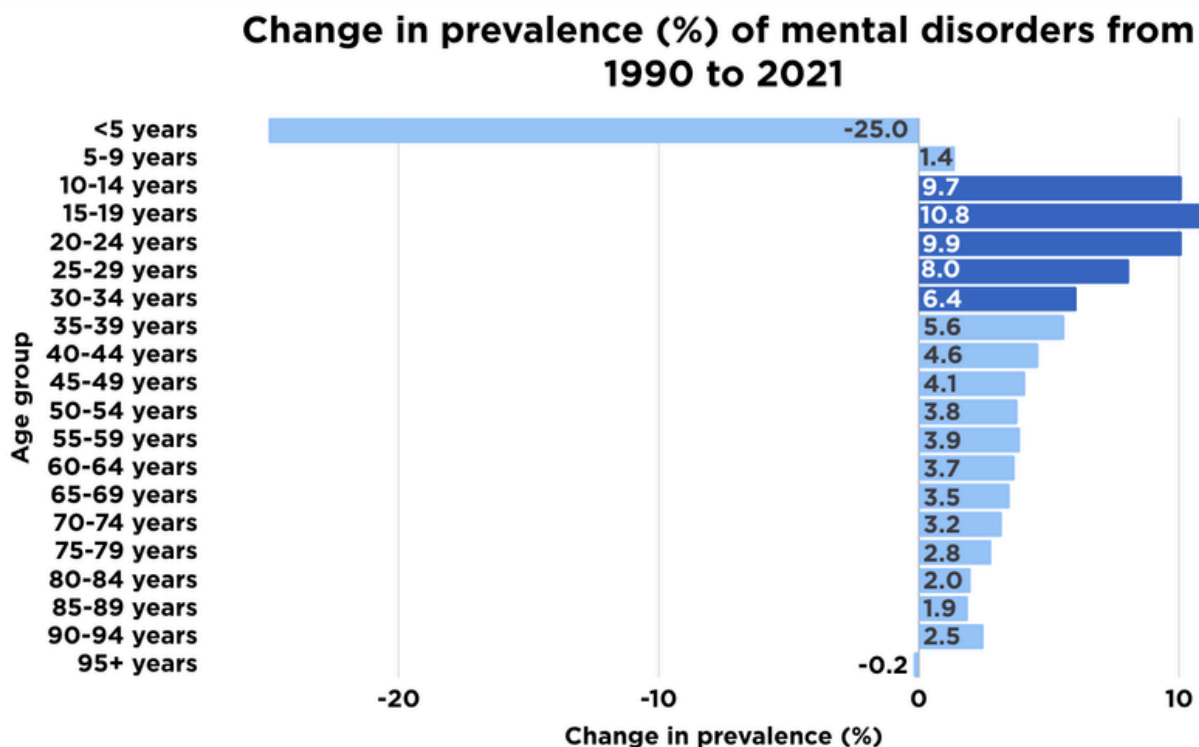


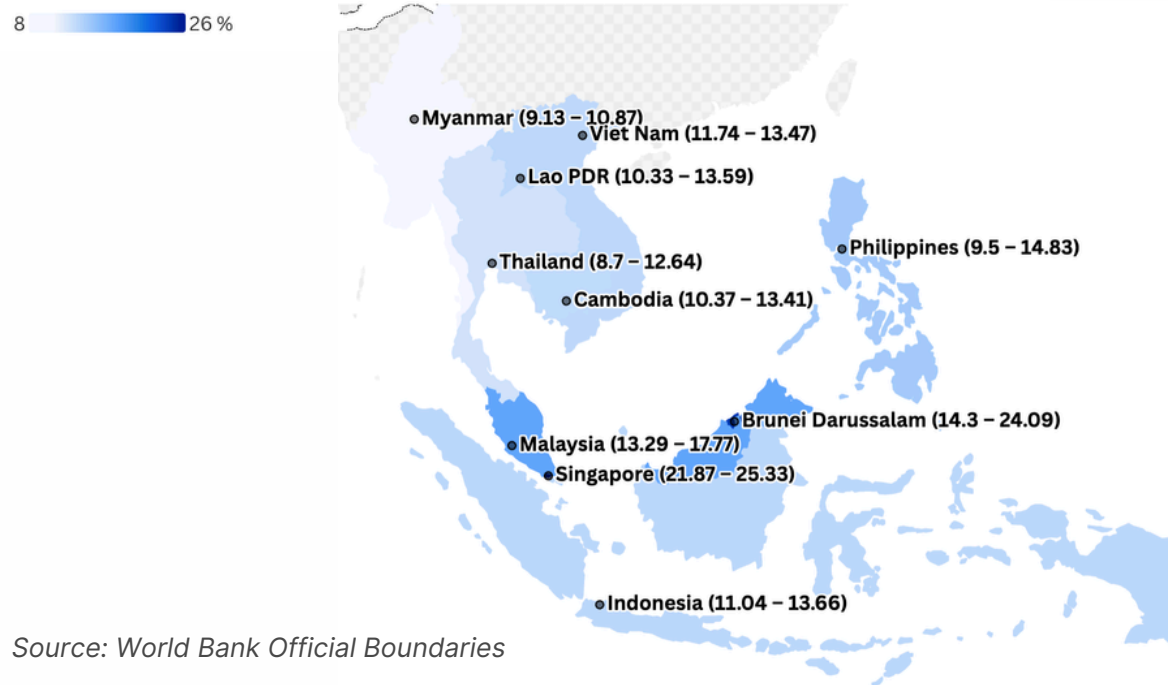
Figure 3: Prevalence across 1990 to 2021 in ASEAN youth (by percentage change)

Note: The -25% decline in <5 years olds was largely attributable to reductions in idiopathic developmental intellectual disability (classified under mental disorders in GBD, though sometimes considered a neurodevelopmental disorder)

The countries with the highest proportion of DALYs due to mental disorders in youth are Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, and Malaysia.

DALY% due to mental disorders, ages 15–34

Values show the range (min–max) across 15–34 age brackets.



Source: World Bank Official Boundaries

Figure 4: Heatmap showing Proportion of DALYs (95% UI) (in %) attributable to mental disorders relative to the DALYs for all causes across countries in 2021. The map is for illustrative purposes only.

Anxiety disorders are the most prevalent amongst ASEAN youth, affecting every 5 in 100 youth.

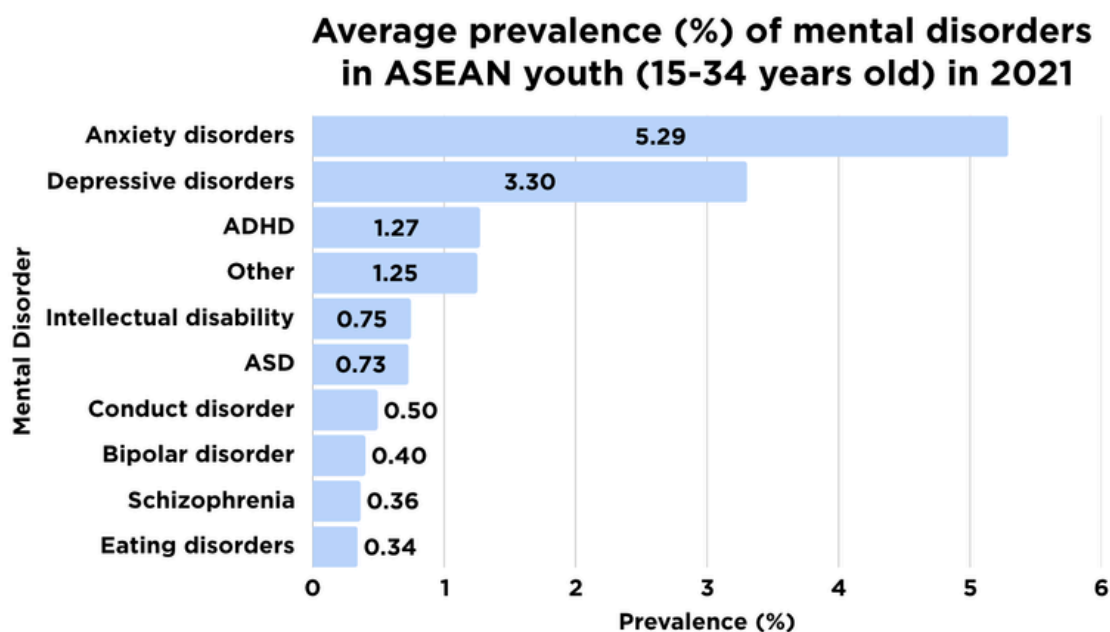


Figure 5: Average prevalence of mental disorders in ASEAN youth in 2021 (percentage breakdown by mental disorder)

Note: Prevalence percentages are weighted averages taken from prevalence in age groups 15-19, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34.

ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; ASD: Autism Spectrum Disorder

2. Umbrella Review of Mental Health Research in ASEAN

What do we actually know about youth mental health in ASEAN?

There is a lot of research on mental health in ASEAN, but it is not always easy to see the big picture. To get a sense of scale, we ran a broad search of a database using mental health and ASEAN-related terms. This search returned over 200,000 records, showing just how much mental health research exists across the region.

The figure below shows how this research has grown over time. For much of the past century, publication numbers were low. In contrast, most mental health research linked to ASEAN has been published in the past two decades, with especially rapid growth in recent years. This sharp rise highlights both the expanding evidence base and the challenge of making sense of it.

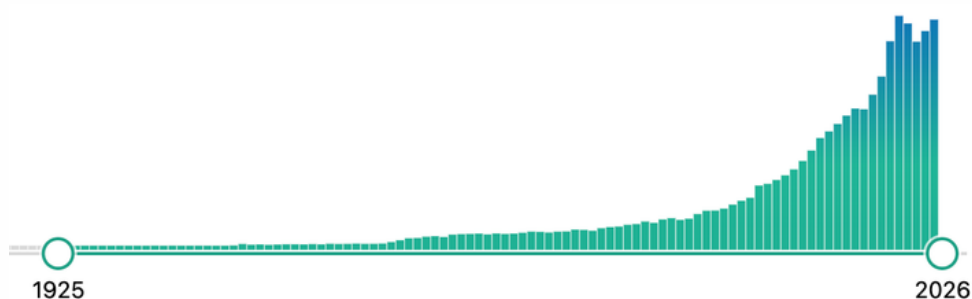


Figure 6: Annual number of mental health-related publications linked to ASEAN. Records are from a broad PubMed search and may vary in topic, quality, and relevance.

But quantity does not always mean quality, or relevance for young people.

That is why we are carrying out an umbrella review, which brings together findings from existing systematic reviews and meta-analyses. Instead of looking at individual studies one by one, this approach helps us understand what the evidence as a whole is really saying.

So far, we have identified 43 relevant reviews, and we are currently pulling together information from them. These reviews already summarise evidence from 820 unique individual studies across the region.

This work is being done with the Harvard Lab for Youth Mental Health and researchers from across ASEAN. We aim to complete the review in early 2026 and will share the findings publicly once the analysis is complete.

For those who want more detail on how the review is being carried out, the review plan is publicly available on PROSPERO:

<https://www.crd.york.ac.uk/PROSPERO/view/CRD420251180762>

3. Landscape Map of Youth Mental Health Initiatives

We mapped youth-led and youth-focused initiatives across the region, highlighting organisations and/or projects that have demonstrated innovations, impact, and good practices. The findings will show “who is doing what”, thus supporting collaboration and visibility among youth networks, researchers, and policymakers.

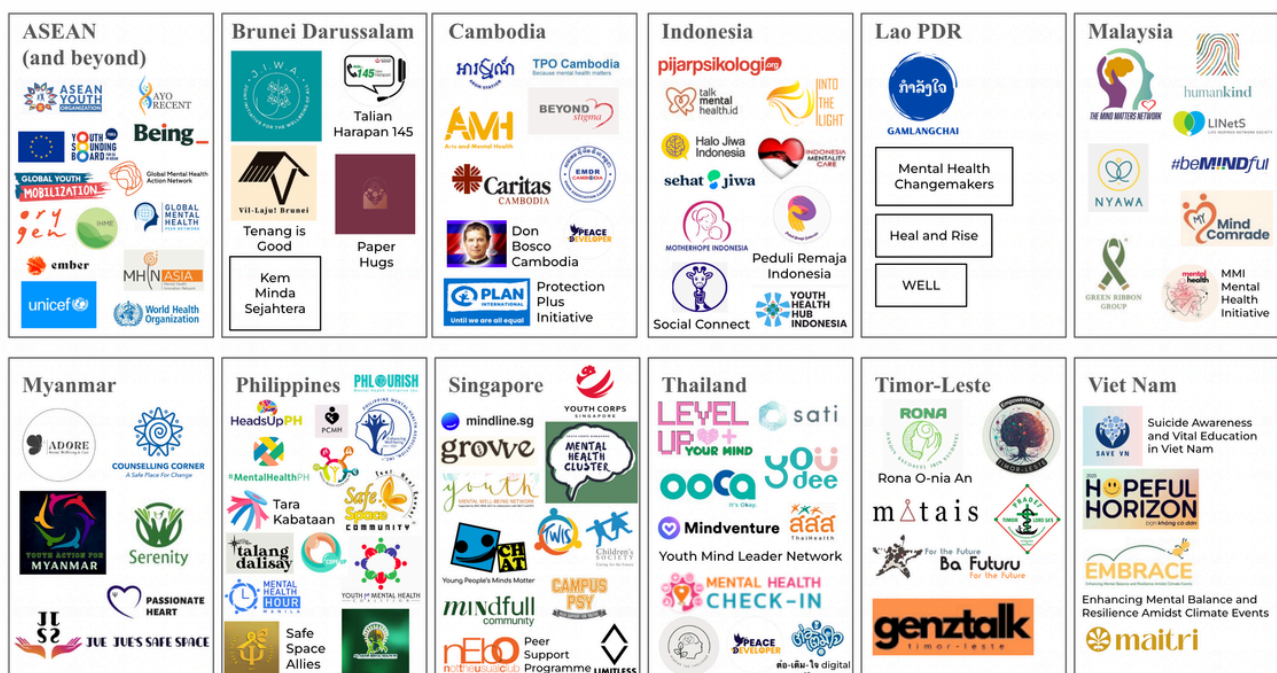
Our country engagement team included members from ASEAN countries who helped identify initiatives in their own contexts. Their local knowledge and multilingualism were essential for finding grassroots, youth-led, or hard-to-find projects. We also crowdsourced initiatives from conference participants and partners to fill in gaps.

We prioritised youth-led or youth-focused innovations, including new ways to promote mental health, provide peer support, or influence policy. In countries where youth-led initiatives were more limited, we included broader mental health services for young people, to give a more complete picture of their landscape.

Kindly note that all of the following landscape maps are non-exhaustive and are for illustrative purposes only. While care was taken to identify, verify, and categorise initiatives based on available information, some initiatives may not be included, and some details may be incomplete, outdated, or interpreted differently by contributors. Many initiatives operate across multiple areas, and categorisation reflects an informed judgment of their primary focus and may not capture the full scope of their work. Inclusion does not imply endorsement or assessment of impact. Nevertheless, the map provides a useful starting point for understanding who is working on youth mental health and for building connections across the region.

The map is intended as a learning and collaboration tool for the ASEAN youth mental health community. It incorporates input from partners, including the Mental Health Innovation Network (MHIN) and Orygen Global, and will continue to be refined and used to inform future discussions.

Country Map



Map of initiatives (breakdown by countries and functions)

Initiatives were grouped into five functional categories:

- **Awareness & Destigmatisation:** Raising mental health awareness and reducing stigma.
- **Peer Support & Lived Experience:** Spaces or advocacy by/for young people with lived experience.
- **Service Delivery & Programme Innovation:** Youth-focused or innovative programmes and services.
- **Policy & Systems Influence:** Initiatives influencing mental health policies or systems.
- **Research & Knowledge Translation:** Generating research to enhance mental health practices in various contexts/ localities.

This categorisation helps show what types of support exist across countries, how they may be similar or different, and where there may be gaps.

| Countries | Awareness & Destigmatisation | Peer Support & Lived Experience | Service Delivery & Programme Innovation | Policy & Systems Influence | Research & Knowledge Translation |
|-------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Brunei Darussalam | | | | | |
| Cambodia | | | | | |
| Indonesia | | | | | |
| Lao PDR | | | | | |
| Malaysia | | | | | |
| Myanmar | | | | | |
| Philippines | | | | | |
| Singapore | | | | | |
| Thailand | | | | | |
| Timor-Leste | | | | | |
| Viet Nam | | | | | |

Note: These maps are non-exhaustive and are for illustrative purposes only.

Emerging Insights from Youth Organisations

We also shared early insights and reflections drawn from our ongoing engagement with youth partners working on mental health across the region. These insights reflect how organisations are navigating their contexts, engaging young people, and translating ideas into action, and are intended to support learning and exchange across the network.

This page presents brief insights from three youth partners, while the following page features a more detailed organisational interview to provide additional depth. There was expressed interest from youth partners and participants in continuing and gradually deepening this engagement, including through more structured opportunities for shared learning, documentation, and exchange over time.



#MentalHealthPH

Online mental health awareness campaigns

100,000+ social media followers
30+ Activities & Campaigns
14 Global Partners
4 Chapters Nationwide

“To achieve a mentally healthy community, we believe that change must be done at the level of Self, Society, and System (3S). We do this by maximizing social media and Online digital technology, On-Ground activities, and Onward collaborations (3Os).”



Evidence-based peer support

Collaborated with leading universities and national agencies to deliver youth-led mental health education. Piloted in two Jakarta schools (45 students) and now fundraising to expand across colleges and youth communities.

“A youth-led, evidence-based initiative combining peer support with professional insight. Our trained youth counsellors provide empathetic, non-judgemental care that tackles stigma and makes mental health support more relatable in the Indonesian context.”



Community-based awareness and youth storytelling

Mental health awareness sessions delivered in three municipalities, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health Mental Health Section, with support from UNICEF Timor-Leste. This work is complemented by localised audio podcasts and a youth-led video show that provide platforms for young Timorese to share lived experiences.

“We believe that mental health is not a personal weakness but a collective responsibility. By combining community-based engagement with locally relevant media, we aim to create spaces for young people to share experiences and support one another.”

Emerging Insights from Youth Organisations

Interview with Macy Castañeda - Lee, Founder & Director of Talang Dalisay



Talang Dalisay is an entirely youth-led mental health non-profit organisation based in the Philippines, active since 2016. The organisation is accredited by YORP and the Mental Health Innovation Network, has received in-kind support from Oracle NetSuite, has partnered with over 50 non-profit and community organisations, worked with more than 10 schools and universities, and has been recognised by over 30 media platforms.

What makes your initiative unique or innovative?

TD is focused on empowering mental health and disability rights in various ways in the Philippines. Specifically: we focus on helping neurodivergent / mentally ill individuals and their families through peer and community support & integration! We have been working recently with a lot of individuals who have autism, schizophrenia, PTSD, and anxiety; along with their parents as well. A lot of parents reach out to us. So we try to include the family unit in having open conversations with what is needed, and then redirecting them to professional help that is needed. As of recent, TD has really been an anchor in being able to integrate community support for grassroots to professional support.

How has your initiative worked with the local communities so far?

We have had hundreds of youth members serve us, have sent PWD's to schools and have given numerous monetary donations, and have produced over thousands of copies of children's books to folks who need it. I think that we are trying to really focus our organization and look out to the grassroots. What do these grassroots communities want and need and how can we actually give back to them realistically? I think that this growth and evolution has been slow and steady for TD; we are in no rush, and want to really make it as real and meaningful as possible.

What is the biggest challenge you've faced, and how did you overcome it?

It's really hard to run an organization, naturally, there are many people that will have conflict over certain things and it is hard to maintain a big group of people in anything. That's what I struggle with personally as someone who leads TD. I think conversations and honesty help so much. I just try to be as honest as I can, and that's all I can do!

What has been the most meaningful or rewarding outcome of your work?

Seeing PWDs, children, and fellow youth members give positive life updates, feedback, and receiving openness. Everyone involved in TD has only been a blessing!

What advice would you give to others who might want to replicate or scale a similar initiative?

Be genuine, stay realistic, and be true to what you really care about, also never ever forget to collaborate with others because it is better to do things together, as Filipinos and as part of the larger ASEAN!

4. Digital Repository

Background/ Methods

We conducted desk research and engaged with our partners to identify toolkits, frameworks, reports, etc. The repository aims to improve access to credible, evidence-based materials, supporting programme design, advocacy, and policy development.

Policy and research reports

Epidemiology and burden of mental disorders in ASEAN, 1990–2021



Malaysian Youth Mental Health Index (IYRES)



Mental Health Atlas 2024 Report (WHO)

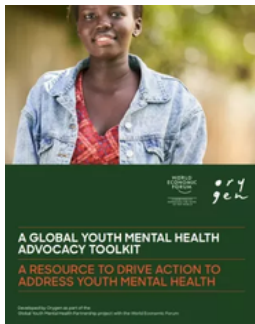


World Mental Health Today 2025 Report (WHO)



Toolkits for youth advocates and leaders

Global Youth Mental Health Advocacy Toolkit (Orygen Global)



Training Toolkit on Supporting the Mental Health and Psychosocial Wellbeing of Young Changemakers (UNICEF)



The Mental Health & Psychosocial Support Network (MHPSS Network)

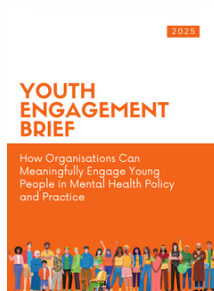


Additional resources in the region

Roundtable on ASEAN Youth Mental Health (IYRES)



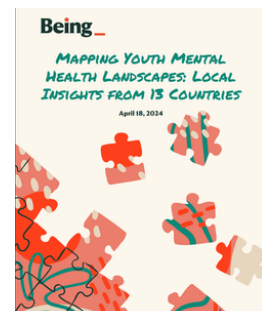
Youth Engagement Brief (Global Mental Health Action Network)



Youth Mental Wellbeing in Asia-Pacific region (Zurich Foundation)



Mapping Youth Mental Health Landscape (Being Initiative)



Session 2

Regional Evidence and Policy Dialogue (EU-ASEAN Perspectives)

Overview

Session 2 brought together regional experts and practitioners to discuss how data, policy frameworks, and systems can better support youth mental health across ASEAN. Drawing on research, national experiences, and regional collaboration, the conversation examined evidence-based approaches, current progress, and priorities for action.

Speakers



Ruth O'Connell

UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office
Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)
Specialist



Dr Jasmine Vergara

WHO Western Pacific Regional Office
Technical Officer for Mental Health and Substance Use



Dr Anna Szücs

National University of Singapore – Yong Loo Lin School
of Medicine
Adjunct Research Fellow



**Nur Diyana Nadirah
Mohd Hadi**

Institute for Youth Research Malaysia (IYRES)
Senior Research Executive

Moderator



**Sheperd Petra
Karauwan**

ASEAN Youth Organization
Country Director of Italy

Session 2

Regional Evidence and Policy Dialogue (EU–ASEAN Perspectives)

Key Discussion Points

What conditions are most important for supporting young people’s mental health across the region?

Panellists agreed that young people need safe, inclusive, and stigma-free environments where mental health is recognised as an essential part of wellbeing. They underscored the importance of community-based and context-appropriate approaches, as well as integrating mental health support into primary and community care.

What are the key challenges currently shaping youth mental health in ASEAN, and how do you think our approaches need to change?

The discussion highlighted the growing impact of climate change, displacement, and social stressors on young people’s mental health. Panellists called for systems that move beyond medicalised responses and instead prioritise prevention, promotion, and psychosocial resilience. They also emphasised the importance of multi-sectoral partnerships across health, education, and social systems to provide coordinated, equitable support.

Across the discussion, meaningful youth participation was identified as vital at every stage, from design to implementation and evaluation of mental health programmes. Panellists also noted that mental health evidence is most effective when it is communicated clearly and connected to young people’s lived experiences, making data both relatable and actionable.

What does the current data tell us about youth mental health in ASEAN, and where are the gaps?

Regional data from the *Global Burden of Disease Study* showed an increasing prevalence and burden of mental disorders among young people in ASEAN. Although data quality is improving, stigma and under-diagnosis continue to obscure the full picture. Panellists emphasised the need for more accessible and affordable services, stronger coordination in research and data sharing, and continued investment to improve data quality and communication across the region.

Malaysia’s ongoing efforts to make mental health a national priority were also discussed. Holding the ASEAN Chairmanship in 2025, the country is well placed to contribute to regional collaboration and continued dialogue on youth mental health. National initiatives such as the Youth Mental Health Index and programmes that train young enumerators to participate in research demonstrate how evidence generation can be strengthened while empowering young people to play an active role in policy development.

Conclusion

The session concluded with a shared commitment to embed mental health across all policies and systems, link research more directly with policymaking, and co-design practical solutions with young people. Panellists also called for strengthened regional collaboration and sustained, coordinated investment to promote wellbeing and resilience across ASEAN.

Session 3

Youth-led Innovations for Mental Health

Overview

Session 3 explored innovative, youth-led approaches to promoting mental health across ASEAN. Drawing from experiences in digital advocacy, community education, and regional collaboration, the discussion examined what drives meaningful impact, the challenges youth-led initiatives face, and how partnerships can help sustain and expand their work.

Speakers



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Moderator



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Session 3

Youth-led Innovations for Mental Health

Key Discussion Points

What kinds of trends and impact are you seeing from youth-led mental health work so far?

Panellists highlighted how young people are embracing new technologies and trends, including digital and AI-based tools, to support mental health. These innovations can expand access and engagement when used ethically and responsibly. Youth-led initiatives are also moving beyond advocacy to implementation, translating ideas into practical solutions underpinned by sustainability, mentorship, and long-term support structures.

What has worked particularly well in engaging young people and building communities?

Panellists also shared how digital platforms can be powerful tools for building supportive mental health communities. Through initiatives such as *#MentalHealthPH*, youth advocates have used online storytelling, live discussions, and evidence-based content to reach wide audiences, normalise mental health conversations, and foster empathy and collective wellbeing. These digital spaces also provide opportunities for volunteers to collaborate with larger organisations, showing how social media can be leveraged to promote awareness and partnerships for mental health.

What does youth participation look like in practice, and how can institutions support it?

Participation includes engaging young people throughout the design, implementation, and evaluation of mental health programmes and policies, recognising lived experience and ensuring appropriate training, support, safeguarding, and opportunities to meaningfully influence decision-making. Organisations such as *Orygen Global* were recognised as key enablers in supporting youth-led mental health initiatives across the region. *Peace Developer*, one of *Orygen's* youth fellow projects, exemplifies how young leaders are building practical, ground-up initiatives that respond to shared regional needs and strengthen community engagement.

Looking ahead, what kinds of support or partnerships are most needed to sustain youth-led initiatives?

Across the discussion, panellists emphasised the importance of strengthening connections among youth networks, institutions, and regional partners such as the *Mental Health Innovation Network (MHIN) Asia Hub*, to share lessons and sustain progress. Genuine youth participation was viewed as essential, with young people engaged as equal partners in design, decision-making, and implementation. Many youth-led initiatives still rely on limited or short-term funding, making it difficult to maintain momentum. There is also a need for safe spaces for experimentation and failure to be built into existing and emerging structures. Participants called for more flexible and accessible funding for youth-led work, continued mentorship, and platforms that link youth initiatives across national, regional, and international levels.

Conclusion

The session closed with a shared vision for deeper collaboration between youth networks, governments, and mental health organisations. Panellists expressed optimism for continued regional dialogue and partnership, particularly as the Philippines assumes the ASEAN Chairmanship in 2026, and looked forward to building on youth-led momentum to advance mental health innovation and co-create a more supportive and resilient ASEAN region.

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