WHO IS HBGI?

The Healthy Brains Global Initiative (HBGI) was established in collaboration with the World Bank and with the support of the World Health Organization and UNICEF. Our early funding was largely from the Wellcome Trust, Johnson & Johnson and Otsuka. We were set up to address the global lack of prioritization and funding for mental health - the biggest unmet health and social challenge impacting more than one billion people globally, creating an economic burden of more than $3 trillion.

HBGI addresses this critical issue through introducing a new wave of programs targeting poor mental/brain health and its causes and consequences. We use an ‘outcomes-based’ contracting model, i.e. paying for the outcomes rather than the inputs, to drive the impact of these programs, to minimize waste and to increase accountability – as well as to encourage innovation and localization.

Mental health is cross-cutting and touches us all throughout our lives. HBGI’s programs might entail services delivered in mainstream health provision, but they might also focus on wider livelihoods issues such as poverty, child pregnancy, newborn mortality, alcohol and substance use, or unemployment. The service providers might be NGOs (public or private sector), local or international, or governments.

With the oversight of a Board of Directors and an experienced management team, and with guidance from a Lived Experience Council and an Advisory Council, we operate in two ways:

1. Pooling the funds of donors into Regional or Thematic Outcomes Funds (e.g. a Fund for Africa or a Fund for Technology), which HBGI manages and uses to contract new programs, identified in partnership with stakeholders, with HBGI as the ‘outcomes funder’.

2. Supporting fund holders, such as governments, to design and mobilize contracted programs, building and operating performance management systems to drive the outcomes and impact of these programs.
It is now well established that poor mental health is closely associated with a number of adverse real-world outcomes. These include things like impaired occupational achievement, educational underperformance, comorbid physical illness, and even the trajectory of infant development based on maternal mental illness. Furthermore, assessment of the quality of mental health care has traditionally defaulted to more easily measured process and structure metrics, which are removed from true patient outcomes. While they are easier to measure, improvement in these metrics does not always translate into improvement in patient-centric outcomes. Linking payment to these metrics does not incentivize personalized care, can be inefficient, and may actually distract from the needs of the individual.

To address these issues, the outcomes that HBGI pays for are largely ‘functional outcomes’ which focus on impact on individual lives. Our contracts target the things that truly change someone’s life chances, such as, a newborn achieving developmental milestones, a return to school and improved educational attainment, a reduction in alcohol use, better management of a physical health condition, or someone securing a job. If we contract the delivery of training, we want to see and pay for the result of that training, such as, health workers then identifying mental health issues and providing quality care or referring efficiently to specialists.

The providers of these programs, of course, need working capital to cover their running costs before they deliver (and are paid for) the outcomes. HBGI addresses this in a number of ways, including providing loans or mobilization allowances direct to the providers (repaid through the outcomes achieved) or bringing in social/impact investment.

In every case, HBGI ensures that there is a really strong performance management system wrapped around each program. This includes tracking, reporting and reviewing what is happening through live data. These programs are data rich, which enables ‘implementation research’ to capture what is working, for HBGI to disseminate widely.

For these programs to work, and to influence future policy and funding decisions, HBGI collaborates closely with governments. This can be achieved through partnering with international and regional stakeholders who already have effective government networks.

HBGI is growing rapidly. We aim to publish a Request for Proposals for programs to be financed by our first fund by the end of this year - the HBGI Outcomes Fund for Sport & Mental Health (which is also in support of UNESCO’s Fit for Life flagship sports program). Two further funds will follow in 2024. We will be commencing our first Technical Assistance to a regional government this summer, on the contracting and performance management of services targeting homelessness and mental health. We already support a refugee support Social Impact Bond in the UK, and youth employment Impact Bonds in South Africa and Palestine (with funding for the latter from The World Bank).

Please contact Richard Johnson, CEO, at richard.johnson@hbgi.org or Garen Staglin, Co-Chair and Founder, at garen.staglin@hbgi.org for additional information and to find out how you can get involved.