

# Reasonable Accommodations Guidelines:

For people with Lived Experience in-person events



**GLOBAL  
MENTAL  
HEALTH**  
PEER NETWORK

The Global Mental Health Peer Network (GMHPN) is an international organisation that builds capacity among people with lived experience of a mental health condition through empowerment, peer-to-peer mentorship and peer support. The organisation has an established Experts by Experience Consultancy Services unit that is unique in that it involves only persons with lived experience in the delivery of services.

## Reasonable Accommodations for Travel Arrangements

People with lived experience are often invited to participate in in-person events, including conferences, workshops and related events. This may involve travelling, and for some it may mean travelling to different continents. Most of us have to be meticulous in planning our travels to limit the impact on our mental health and wellbeing.

Important factors to take into consideration:

- Invited participation in events are usually sponsored by the organisers, however, more often not all expenses are covered, such as visa fees, additional nights accommodation (to recover from travel), meals and other incidentals – for many this becomes financially distressing, despite their full commitment to provide quality contributions and expertise – especially when their local currency is significantly weaker than the currency of the country where the event is hosted
- Time zone differences – can disturb sleep patterns and impact on medication schedules
- Medication side-effects – can impact on alertness and cause disorientation
- Several connecting flights – can increase anxiety, especially when it could be anticipated that flights may be delayed and connecting flights may be missed
- Length of flights – can disturb sleep patterns and impact on medication schedules
- Self-payment for imbursement after event – for many individuals, specifically from LMICs and where events are in HIC, can often not afford to cover travel and accommodation costs due to the significant difference in currency exchange
- Arrival dates the night before or on the day when an event starts in instances where travel time extend more than 4 hours can hinder meaningful participation and quality contributions in such event

- Receiving travel details (flights, ground transportation and accommodation) at short notice, can cause severe anxiety
- Where visa application processes are involved of which at times could take up to 5 months, could cause increased anxiety when travel arrangements are made within an inadequate timeframe that could impact on receiving a visa on time
- Many persons may not be frequent travellers or may travel for the first time to a foreign country, therefore may be exciting but also a scary experience – event organisers often have multiple people coordinating logistics around the event and for some it may become confusing when having to deal with a number of people around travel arrangements

#### **Reasonable accommodations:**

- When inviting the person, be clear about the costs that will be covered in advance, so that the person can make an informed decision whether or not they will be able to attend and afford uncovered expenses (if any) from their own pockets and that would not cause any financial hardship
- Provide the person well in advance with the relevant travel information and support for submission of visa applications where applicable
- Be reasonable when booking flights to far distance destinations to ensure that the person has sufficient time to recover from such a flight/ trip and are able to adjust to time zone differences, before being expected to participate in an event – it is recommended to allow for at least 24 hours recovery/ adjustment time before an event, however, in some instances a person may require additional time, depending on various factors such as time zone difference, length of flight and medication schedule
- Traveling in itself can be distressing for some and to some extent may cause anxiety for any person, and to limit this impact on mental health and wellbeing, it is recommended to always book flights with the least amount of connecting flights wherever possible or at least sufficient layover time to avoid rushing or missing connecting flights
- Some may experience anxiety when placed in a confined space, such as an aircraft and may have a specific preference to seating options – it is recommended to always enquire which seating option should be booked (depending on the airline's provision to select seating at booking of flights)
- Where possible and to avoid any potential confusion or miscommunication, and to limit anxiety, dedicate one member from the event organiser to be a point of contact to provide the person with any support or information they may require from acceptance of attendance of the event to the date of return to home

## Reasonable Accommodations for Event Proceedings

Apart from travelling to in-person events, reasonable considerations should also apply to the event proceedings to ensure meaningful participation. Such reasonable accommodations should be determined based on the needs expressed by the individual – always ask what these may be.

- Arrival at Hotel – Even when accommodation are covered by event organisers, the usual practices at hotels upon arrival requires a deposit, usually to be paid by credit card, and this may cause distress when a person is not in a financial position to afford such deposit or when the person does not have a credit card or sufficient credit thereon
- Hotel Room – In the event of an emergency alert (fire or other), assist or help guide the person to the exit (if at night, medication may make it difficult to wake up and may cause disorientation)
- Dining Room – seating options available in quiet section, not surrounded by other tables (conditions with associated anxiety may result in increased anxiety when within a crowd of people)
- Important Information – anything pertaining to the event proceedings, announcement or other information requiring the person's acknowledgement thereof, should not only be verbal but written (concentration problems impact on memory)
- Early Starting Time – For some it can be particularly difficult to wake up in the mornings due to medication side-effects, therefore, it is recommended that in such instances, consideration is given to the agenda/program for the person's presentation to be scheduled at a reasonable time
- Mental Health First Aid/ Peer Support – Trained Mental Health First Aider or Peer Supporter on site (to identify and assist in emotional or mental distress or crisis - similar to physical health First Aid, in this case just in terms of mental health)
- Therapy/ Emotional Support Animals should be allowed within reason and upon specific request and motivation from treating psychiatrist/therapist
- Provision for frequent breaks
- A dedicated "peer room" that is quiet and comfortable, where individuals could go to relax and destress, and be with other peers

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THESE CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS MAY NOT BE LISTING ALL REQUIREMENTS THAT A PERSON MAY NEED, THEREFORE, THE PERSON SHOULD AT ALL TIMES BE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE THEIR SPECIFIC NEEDS.**