

EMPOWER: TAPPING A NEW WORKFORCE TO DELIVER QUALITY MENTAL HEALTH CARE

A critical shortage of specialist providers impairs access to mental health care in the U.S. and around the world. [The EMPOWER program](#) addresses that crisis by deploying digital tools, products, and methods to enable frontline workers, community health workers, and nonspecialists to deliver high-quality, evidence-based care for various mental health disorders.

[Pioneered in India](#) and rigorously evaluated, EMPOWER trains, supports, and builds skills to develop a cadre of frontline mental health providers.

OVERVIEW

- ▶ About half the world's population lives in countries with just [one psychiatrist for every 200,000 or more people](#).
- ▶ In the U.S., more than [one in five adults live with a mental illness](#).
- ▶ Only [half of people](#) in the U.S. with mental illness receive treatment.
- ▶ EMPOWER trains frontline health workers to deliver brief, targeted mental health care.
- ▶ This shift of labor from specialists to frontline health workers is an example of “task sharing,” an approach supported by more than 100 randomized controlled trials from more than 40 countries. (Read more about task-sharing in [JAMA Psychiatry](#), [Focus](#), and the [Lancet Psychiatry](#).)
- ▶ Frontline workers do not replace specialists. They instead complement the specialists' work to fill gaps in care.
- ▶ Frontline workers begin their training with a foundational skills course, then move on to disorder-specific training modules that are selected and vetted by a review panel.
- ▶ EMPOWER uses a multi-step model to help frontline workers learn how to eventually deliver care.

TAKE ACTION

- ▶ Watch an overview video of [how EMPOWER works](#).
- ▶ Learn more about the [research on task sharing](#).
- ▶ Write to EMPOWER at empower@hms.harvard.edu to learn more.

IMPACT

- ▶ EMPOWER builds on [more than two decades of clinical and implementation work](#) in India and elsewhere on how to deliver care in low-resource settings. The work is also adaptable to high-resource settings.
- ▶ The task-sharing model of EMPOWER allows more individuals to provide mental health care, expanding access in many settings, including those with limited resources.
- ▶ EMPOWER targets common global mental health concerns, including: [depression](#), [emotional disorders in youth](#), [autism spectrum disorder](#), and [severe mental disorders](#).
- ▶ In future, EMPOWER aims to address alcohol and substance abuse, dementia and related neurodegenerative conditions, bereavement, trauma and PTSD, early child development, and acute distress.
- ▶ As of 2023, in partnership with the Indian NGO Sangath, EMPOWER has [trained more than 1,000 providers](#) to identify and help adults living with depression. These trained providers have conducted 15,000 counseling sessions, detected close to 3,000 individuals with depression, and provided care to 90 percent of them.
- ▶ EMPOWER is currently [expanding to Texas](#) through [TEACH](#), an NIH-funded project that includes Baylor Scott & White Health, University of Texas at Arlington, and a social impact tech company, Dimagi, Inc.; and through a collaboration with the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute to build capacity of frontline workers to address depression in diverse communities.