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[TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

Urban mental health: a defining moment for architects and planners

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"Health can no longer be addressed by the health sector alone" - Margaret Chan, Director General of the World Health Organisation

The World Health Organization's 9th Global Health Promotion Conference in Shanghai a few months ago issued a call to action for architects and urban planners all over the world. In one of her final major speeches as the World Health Organisation's Director General, Margaret Chan stated that we must ensure that people's living environments both support and inspire better health. Unusually, she was addressing an audience not just of public health specialists, policymakers and politicians, but of city mayors. Her words indicated a shift in the global public health conversation, with a widening of remit. Importantly for architects and planners, she emphasised that those involved in creating people's living environments must do so in a way that supports and promotes good health and healthy choices. This means that for the resilient, sustainable cities we all want and need, urban plans need to be designed, evaluated and approved using a health lens. This approach has been increasingly discussed and intermittently applied for several years. However, Chan's speech felt like a defining moment in bringing architects, urban planners and other citymakers fully into the public health fold. She also emphasised mental health.

Mental health is, of course, a key component of the definition of health. And yet it is sometimes overlooked in the rush to deliver physical health promotion initiatives. [Edition 2](#) of the Journal of Urban Design and Mental Health seeks to inform and inspire with understanding, ideas, knowledge, opportunities and examples about just how architects, planners and other citymakers can approach the integration of mental health into the city.

In Edition 2, we seek to explore opportunities to design for better mental health by examining different angles on how the urban built environment interacts with mental health. Tanzil Shafique contends that US approaches to planning and design have created a 'lonelitia' and argues for the need for the country to overcome an '[urbanism of mass destruction](#)' and Colin Ellard discusses opportunities for [methodology innovation in urban design and mental health research](#). In the first of a new series, Jan Golembiewski provides an in-depth analysis of [the associations between psychosis and the built environment](#), grounded in neuroscience, and Latoiah Williams and Quncie Williams discuss [opportunities for spatial design to support children's developmental mental health](#). Research by Gillespie, LeVasseur and Michael investigates the important [links between neighbourhood amenities and depression in older adults](#) in the US city of Philadelphia, revealing some important lessons for designers and planners in developing communities that better support older people's mental health - an essential question for the world's ageing urban populations. Finally, much of the research on urban design and mental health tends to focus on the US, Canada and Europe; in this edition we publish [one of the first studies in the field of urban happiness in Iran](#), in which Samavati and Modares study physical features of the urban built environment in Tehran in terms of links to population happiness. This raises the important question of how to share learnings, insights and ideas between different cities around the world on addressing mental health through urban design. We launch a [new methodology](#) for city case studies: researchers may wish to consider implementing the method for a chosen city for future editions.

This journal focuses on planning and design to promote and support urban mental health. The articles in Edition 2 provide new insights and inspiration as we move forward in answering the call of Margaret Chan and the World Health Organisation: particularly in these turbulent times, this is the moment to start delivering substantial mental health impact through urban planning and design.

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