

## SASMHD : AIMS:

- To promote access to specialised mental health services for Deaf people with mental health problems and promote the development of appropriate services.
- To promote specialised habilitation and/or rehabilitation services for Deaf people, who have been deprived of opportunities for development or maintenance of life skills.
- To promote opportunities for training both Deaf and hearing people to work in the field of Mental Health and Deafness.
- To create a network for professionals through whom they can share experiences, exchange information and keep up to date with new practices.
- To promote an appropriate range of meaningful community care to avoid inappropriate institutionalisation of Deaf people.
- Develop specific mental health promotion schemes for use in schools and within the community

### **Management Committee**



Chairperson: Rev At Smit  
Vice-Chairperson: Dr Paul de Wet  
Secretary: Mrs Hanlie Visser  
Treasurer: Mr Ernest Kleinschmidt  
Additional member(s): Mrs Elizabeth Ramokhele

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# THE SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND DEAFNESS



### **SASMHD**

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## Definition of Mental Health

Mental Health is a condition of well-being in relation to self and others characterized by such qualities as positive self-esteem, accurate perception of others and the world, stability and appropriateness in mood, balance and purposiveness in behaviour, dependable sense of identity and values, adaptability to one's environment, ability to engage in productive work and fulfilling love, and commitment to a source of devotion beyond oneself. As such, mental health is an active process, not merely the absence of illness. (Aist 1990)

"The Deaf person's greatest dream is to be accepted as a person in their own right. To be a full contributing member of society, who is entitled to all rights and all opportunities offered to other people, and to have the right to an own language and culture."

Health services for Deaf people should be made accessible in his/her first and often only language, Sign Language. Without fluency in sign language most health practitioners are unable to ensure elicit essential symptoms of mental or physical distress from a Deaf person. This fundamental communication failure is a serious infringement of their human rights and leads to inappropriate hospitalisation without informed consent, inappropriate treatment and aftercare.

## History/Background

The South African Society for Mental Health and Deafness (SASMHD) was launched on 12 March 2003 during a 3-day workshop in Worcester at the Institute for the Deaf and Lewensruimte.

Mental Health includes healthy emotional, psychological and social development and the prevention and treatment of mental illness and other disorders.

The special needs to consider in Mental Health care of the Deaf and people working in the field include language/communication skills, cultural and many other diagnostic and treatment aspects.

SASMHD is concerned with the Mental Health of all Deaf people, whatever their age of onset, degree of deafness or mode of communication.

## Issues in Mental Health & Deafness:

There are mental health implications for all groups especially those experiencing restricted opportunities and sometimes discrimination. Deaf people often face significant additional challenges, as their language of choice, Sign Language, is different from that of their family and society.

In South Africa, there is limited knowledge of deafness amongst professionals working in the area of Mental Health.

Projects in the field of Mental Health and Deafness, role-players in the field and interested parties in Southern Africa/Africa need to be identified and the support and involvement of professionals and the broader community explored.

People working in the area need specialist knowledge of issues such as Deaf Culture, Deaf Identity and the necessary Communication Skills including Sign Language, to effectively communicate, assess and treat Deaf clients.

There is a lack of formal government recognition of the need for a specialised mental health service with suitable skilled staff for Deaf people.

The South African Society for Mental Health and Deafness is a national organization that promotes accessible mental health services of high quality for all persons with a hearing loss.

On studying the inside of a shell, the world-renowned Renaissance artist Leonardo da Vinci once said of the spiral "It is the most perfect shape in nature."

From the beginning of time, the spiral shape has been used on the cave walls of primitive artists. The Aborigines in Australia, the San people in Southern Africa and the Indian tribes in South America all used the spiral as a symbol of perfection and eternity. The young child when first beginning to scribble often develops a "spiral-like" design as he or she develops finer motoric skills.

The choice of the spiral to represent mental health is very appropriate as it is considered by many to be the perfect shape. It is also an open-ended shape with a beginning and an end but the spiral repeats itself which is indicative of self-assessment and self-improvement / development. The spiral used in the context of mental health and Deafness gives one the idea of striving for perfection within a very sound support system as to enable the client / person to reach fulfilment.

