



Advancing mental health data for young people: PAMHoYA project

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Pictured from left to right are some members of the PAMHoYA team: [Ms Angel Maredi \(Wits\)](#), [Dr Nataly Wollett \(Wits\)](#), [Dr Silas Verkijika \(Sol Plaatje University\)](#), [Dr Vundli Ramakolo \(SAMRC\)](#), [Ms Audrey Moyo \(Stellenbosch University\)](#), [Dr Darshini Govindasamy \(SAMRC/WITS Centre for Health Economics and Decision Science\)](#), [Mr Augustine Khumalo \(SAPRIN\)](#), [Assoc Prof Innocent Maposa \(Stellenbosch University\)](#), [Dr Trust Gangaidzo \(Wits\)](#) and [Mr Linda Mazibuko \(Wits\)](#).

As mental health datasets in South Africa remain fragmented and researchers continue working in silos, a new initiative is breaking barriers. PAMHoYA (*Co-development of a Mental Health Data Discovery Platform and Harmonisation of Mental Health Measures for Young People in South Africa*), brings together a multidisciplinary team from the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC), the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), Stellenbosch University, Sol Plaatje University, and University College London (UCL) under the Mental Health Data Prize Africa, funded by the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) in partnership with Wellcome Trust-UK.

The project aims to: (a) map and integrate available meta-data sources on depression and anxiety; (b) design an open-access, user-oriented mental health data discovery platform; (c) harmonise mental health measures using Natural Language Processing; and (d) harmonise SAPRIN and NIDS datasets as a use-case framework.



This project started in June 2025 and will run until May 2026. The team held its stakeholder launch engagement on 23 June 2025 at SAMRC, hosted by the Health Systems Research Unit's Youth Health Economics focal area. The event was graced by key stakeholders, including Dr Dudu Shiba (Director for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Programme, NDoH), Ms Jeanette Hunter (Deputy Director-General for Primary Health Care, NDoH), Professor Crick Lund (King's College), and representatives from civil society. [Click for more information](#). Dr Darshini Govindasamy (senior PI-SAMRC/WITS Centre for Health Economics and Decision Science), discussed how this platform can be leveraged to inform South Africa's health reform plans and build the next generation of data scientists in public health.

In November, the PAMHoYA team participated in the Mental Health Data Prize Africa Awardees Workshop in Kampala, hosted by APHRC in partnership with Wellcome Trust from 3–7 November 2025. The five-day workshop brought together awardees from across Africa to share progress, explore ethical data sharing, strengthen lived experience engagement, and discuss innovations such as AI-driven harmonisation. PAMHoYA was represented by Dr Trust Gangaidzo (Wits), Ms Audrey Moyo (Stellenbosch University), Mr Augustine Khumalo (SAPRIN), and Mr Linda Mazibuko (Wits).

“The APHRC Awardees Workshop in Uganda provided an excellent platform to share our PAMHoYA work, learn from fellow awardees, and appreciate how our project fits within the broader Mental Health Data Prize Africa initiative. The week strengthened collaboration across teams, revealed clear synergies, and offered rich networking opportunities, all complemented by exceptional Ugandan hospitality,” said Dr Trust Gangaidzo, PI.

“The lived experience piece: it was interesting to learn about different projects under the Wellcome Trust foundation. All projects are invested in enhancing mental health outcomes; however, the aims are diverse and that calls for different efforts from the LE teams. It seems a bit tricky to understand how to embed the LEEs in projects that are technical, i.e., PAMHoYA, and that means the investment is slightly different to an intervention project like the group psychotherapy project. The lesson for me there is that LEE investment is not clear-cut or one-shoe-fits-all situation; however, open-mindedness and versatility are key.” said Mr Linda Mazibuko, lived experience researcher.

On 24 November, the team hosted its second stakeholder workshop at the Wits School of Public Health, facilitated by the Wits Centre for Health Policy. This session focused on sharing research progress and gathering feedback on platform functionality from diverse stakeholders, including people with lived experience. The following day, a capacity-building workshop featured expert presentations on mental health instrument harmonisation, the application of Natural Language Processing (NLP), and the potential of Large Language Models (LLMs) for augmented analytics and interactive data discovery. The team is incorporating this feedback to improve the platform and remains committed to ongoing stakeholder engagement.

Co-investigator Ms Audrey Moyo explained, “Engaging stakeholders and lived experience experts ensures PAMHoYA reflects real-world needs and remains accessible and meaningful for those who will use it.”

SAPRIN is a key partner in this initiative, hosting the PAMHoYA platform on its data repository and providing access to longitudinal mental health data from its HDSS nodes. SAPRIN’s infrastructure ensures secure, open access to the platform for researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders. PAMHoYA is working closely with Mr Augustine Khumalo from SAPRIN on the project, and Dr Linda Maoyi, SAPRIN’s former Data Manager, was also in close contact to ensure the PAMHoYA platform integrates seamlessly into the SAPRIN repository.

Augustine Khumalo of SAPRIN commented that, “Integrating PAMHoYA into SAPRIN’s repository ensures that the platform will be accessible to different stakeholders across South Africa.”

The PAMHoYA project is more than a technical solution, it is a collaborative effort to transform how mental health data is accessed and used in South Africa. By harmonising fragmented datasets and creating a single discovery platform, PAMHoYA will reduce the time and effort researchers spend searching for data and provide a clear pathway for harmonising mental health instruments. Crucially, the inclusion of young people with lived experience and continuous engagement with stakeholders ensures the platform is not only scientifically robust but also relevant, ethical, and user-driven. This co-development approach strengthens trust, improves usability, and guarantees that the platform reflects the realities of those it seeks to serve.