

ZAMBIA

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH STRONGMINDS



SCALING
COMMUNITY-BASED
MENTAL HEALTH
CARE THROUGH
PARTNERSHIPS

COLLABORATORS



STRONGMINDS®

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

StrongMinds Zambia has rapidly grown since beginning operations in 2019, building on the proven success of its group talk therapy model in Uganda. By adapting Interpersonal Group Therapy (IPT-G) to local contexts, StrongMinds has earned trust, expanded reach, and become a key partner in addressing the country's urgent mental health needs. Early support from the Ministry of Health and strong engagement with community and faith leaders enabled the organization to begin providing care within months, overcoming skepticism toward NGOs and laying the foundation for long-term impact.

SCALING COMMUNITY-BASED MENTAL HEALTHCARE IN ZAMBIA

Building Trust

StrongMinds introduced Interpersonal Group Therapy (IPT-G) in Zambia in 2019 at the invitation of the Ministry of Health, which pledged support and placed its Chief Mental Health Officer on the StrongMinds Zambia Board. This government backing helped identify priority areas, engage volunteers, and build community credibility.

Within three months, therapy groups were operating, with trust reinforced through local partnerships. Church volunteers played a central role in early outreach: as trusted community hubs, they hosted early meetings and helped spread awareness. StrongMinds' deployment of Zambian staff proficient in local languages further deepened acceptance and legitimacy.



WHAT IS IPT-G?

Group Interpersonal Therapy (IPT-G) is an evidence-based, WHO-endorsed group talk therapy model that can be effectively delivered by lay community health workers. In IPT-G therapy groups, facilitators try to create a safe space for clients to open up with peers about their worries and struggles.

Over six sessions, these lay counselors guide structured discussions to help participants identify their underlying triggers of depression. Group members work together to strategize solutions to their problems, learn coping mechanisms, practice interpersonal skills, and identify support structures to lean on after therapy ends.

ABOUT STRONGMINDS

StrongMinds is a global nonprofit organization with a mission to democratize access to mental healthcare for people with depression, globally.

StrongMinds partners with governments to transform the way mental health care is delivered, integrating low-cost, evidence-based solutions into existing community-based programs and systems.

Learning and Adapting to Treat More People

StrongMinds continuously refines its model to reach more people at lower cost. In Zambia--over time--therapy cycles were reduced from ten to six weeks, maintaining effectiveness while improving completion rates.

Initially, therapy groups were led by StrongMinds staff. Gradually, this shifted to community volunteers (usually former therapy group participants) leading groups. StrongMinds' data showed that these peer facilitators with lived depression experience are highly effective at building trust and achieving clinically significant improvements in depression symptoms for their group members. Programming and visual tools were adapted for adolescents and local languages, ensuring cultural relevance.

These innovations and adaptations ensure the flexibility and durability of the the IPT-G model in Zambian contexts.

"I feel motivated, and my self-esteem has been boosted. I can stand up, move forward, and achieve great things by staying optimistic."

- Ruth, former member of an adolescent therapy group in Lusaka

WORKING ACROSS GOVERNMENT SECTORS

Partnerships with government ministries are central to StrongMinds Zambia's sustainability strategy.

Ministry of Health

From the outset, StrongMinds has partnered with the Ministry of Health to embed depression care into community health structures. Community Health Workers (CHWs), already integrated into Ministry programs, are trained to facilitate therapy groups, while Ministry staff are equipped to supervise them. This layered structure is central to StrongMinds' low-cost, sustainable model. In Kabwe District, StrongMinds is supporting authorities to establish local capacity for depression treatment with limited external input. At the national level, StrongMinds contributes data to the health system, strengthens policy development, and participates actively in the National Mental Health Technical Working Group.

Ministry of Education

Building on its work with community health workers, StrongMinds now partners with the Ministry of Education to expand mental health care in schools. The Ministry has authorized StrongMinds to operate nationally, and together we are testing the most effective models for scale—whether through peers, guidance counselors, or other approaches. This collaboration is positioning mental health support as an integral part of student well-being and academic success.

Ministry of Community Development and Social Services

In 2025, StrongMinds partnered with the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services to integrate depression care into Community Welfare Assistance Committees (CWACs). These voluntary, community-based groups support the most vulnerable. By embedding group therapy within their activities, StrongMinds and the Ministry are ensuring that mental health care is available alongside other essential social protection services.

The Vision for Sustainability

Mental Health Care Fully Integrated into Existing Government Structures

Through close partnership with government, trusted community structures, and continuous adaptation, StrongMinds Zambia is demonstrating that depression treatment can be delivered at scale, sustainably, and at low cost. Together with the Ministries of Health, Education, and Community Development, Zambia now has a clear pathway to integrate mental health care into national systems—ensuring lasting impact for millions of people.

"When clients share their experiences and receive support, it fills me with joy. I tell them they're not alone—that I've gone through challenges too. It feels good to see them change, even in their physical appearance. Their children look cleaner and happier. That gives me hope."

– Ellen, Peer Therapy Group Leader in Kabwe



A women's therapy group in Misisi Compound, Lusaka.

LEARN MORE

For more information about this partnership, contact: **Frank Harle** at frankestrongminds.org

To learn how to integrate mental health your government programs, contact: **Ambrose Kanyaryeru** at ambrose.kanyaryeru@strongminds.org