

Analysis of political discourses on the mental health law. a critical look at political campaigns in Uruguay

Summary

Through a critical approach, the discursive strategies employed by political actors, the amplification or distortion of these discourses by the media, and the consequences for public opinion are examined. Over the year, significant progress has been observed in the debate on Mental Health Law No. 19.529, with a qualitative analysis of political discourses and an exhaustive review of media coverage, using content analysis methodologies and case studies. Preliminary findings indicate that political narratives have had a significant impact on the perception and understanding of mental health, affecting the acceptance and effectiveness of Law 19.529. Recurrent patterns in the discourses were identified, revealing both the political instrumentalization of mental health and the lack of consensus on best practices for its approaches. Additionally, it was observed that the media plays a crucial role in amplifying these discourses, often distorting information and contributing to the polarization of public opinion. The study also proposes recommendations to improve political communication on mental health issues, promoting a more informed and constructive debate. These recommendations are based on the need for greater transparency, the inclusion of mental health experts' voices, and the creation of educational campaigns that demystify mental disorders. This work is crucial to understanding the political and social dynamics that influence the formulation of mental health policies, with the aim of developing more effective strategies adapted to the population's needs. The results obtained highlight the importance of an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach to address the challenges in communication and implementation of mental health policies.

Keywords: mental health, psychological suffering, political campaigns, mental health law

Volume 8 Issue 1 - 2025

María Gabriela Dotti Ríos,¹ Araceli González Pino,² Leandro Varona Ramírez³

¹Bachelor's Degree in Nursing, Master's Degree in Mental Health, Specialist in Mental Health and Psychiatry, Uruguay

²Graduate in Nursing, Specialist in Mental Health and Psychiatry, Uruguay

³Bachelor of Nursing, Specialist in Mental Health and Psychiatric Nursing, Uruguay

Correspondence: María Gabriela Dotti Ríos, Bachelor's Degree in Nursing, Master's Degree in Mental Health, Specialist in Mental Health and Psychiatry, Uruguay

Received: August 15, 2025 | **Published:** September 04, 2025

Introduction

The current one The Mental Health Law in Uruguay has been a central issue in recent political campaigns, generating a broad debate about its impact and implications for society. The central focus of this research is based on the political discourses surrounding the enactment of this law, examining how different political actors used the issue to advance their agendas and capture electoral support. Mental health, a crucial aspect of human well-being, became a rhetorical battleground where diverse visions and proposals clashed.¹

From a glance From a psycho-social-cultural perspective, it is essential to understand how political discourses can influence public perceptions of mental health and the implementation of effective policies. Politicians, when addressing the Mental Health Law, not only presented their proposals but also shaped the population's attitudes and beliefs on this issue. This study seeks to unravel the discursive strategies employed and their impact on public opinion.¹

The Mental Health Law in Uruguay was presented as a response to the growing concern for the psychosocial well-being of the population. However, its handling in political campaigns revealed deep ideological divisions and divergent approaches to how to address it. It is notable that some political figures emphasized the need for a comprehensive and preventive approach, while others focused on improving existing services and healthcare infrastructure.

Analyzing political discourses allows us to identify the prevailing narratives and how they reflect the priorities and values of different parties. It also reveals the tactics used to persuade voters and the potential consequences of these strategies on public perceptions of mental health. This critical approach is essential for understanding the

political and social dynamics that influence the formulation of public mental health policies.²

The 2019 electoral campaign demonstrated how mental health can be instrumentalized to gain political support. Speeches ranged from promises of radical reforms—such as modernizing health infrastructure, universal access to the health system, and optimizing mental health services—to critiques of the current administration, each seeking to resonate with different segments of the electorate. This study examines how these promises and critiques align with the real needs of the population and the available scientific evidence.

Similarly, we will study how the media amplified or distorted these narratives, affecting public perception and the political agenda. The media plays a fundamental role in shaping public opinion, and its coverage of the Mental Health Act 19529/17 can significantly influence the electoral debate. During the research process, we will review media coverage and its impact on the campaign.³

Finally, this paper aims to offer recommendations for improving political communication on mental health issues, promoting a more informed, constructive, and reflective debate. By understanding discursive strategies and their impact, more effective approaches can be developed to address mental health from a salutogenic perspective in the political sphere, benefiting both policymakers and the general population from a sociocultural perspective.

Goals

General objective

To analyze political discourses on the Mental Health Law in Uruguay from a critical perspective, taking into account its impact on

public perception and the implementation of mental health policies during electoral campaigns.

Specific objectives

- I. Examine the discursive strategies used by political actors in relation to the Mental Health Law and its influence on public opinion.
- II. To assess how the media amplified or distorted political discourse about the Mental Health Act and its impact on the election campaign.
- III. Promote improved political communication on mental health issues to foster more informed and constructive debate.

Justification

Analyzing political discourses surrounding the Mental Health Law in Uruguay is vitally important due to its impact on public perception and the implementation of mental health policies. This work not only addresses a crucial issue for the well-being of the general population throughout the life course, but also offers a critical look at how political actors use mental health as a rhetorical tool in their campaigns. The relevance of this research lies in its ability to unravel discursive strategies and their influence on public opinion, providing a solid foundation for future policies and practices in the field of mental health.³

One of the most notable aspects of this research is its focus on the intersection between politics and mental health. By analyzing political discourses, we can better understand how narratives around mental health are constructed and manipulated to serve political interests. This analysis is crucial for identifying potential distortions and misunderstandings that may arise in the process and for developing more effective and ethical communication strategies.

In the field of mental health, ethics plays a fundamental role in protecting patients' rights. Uruguay's Mental Health Law No. 19,529 emphasizes the importance of dignity and respect in mental health care, aligning itself with international standards. The law incorporates principles of autonomy, confidentiality, and informed consent, ensuring that patients actively participate in decisions about their treatment.¹¹

Informed consent is a crucial aspect of mental health ethics. The law establishes that patients must receive clear and understandable information about their treatment options and potential side effects, enabling them to make informed decisions. This principle protects patients from involuntary or coercive treatment, which has historically been problematic in psychiatry.¹²

Confidentiality is another ethical pillar in mental health practice. The Mental Health Law No. 19,529 guarantees that patients' personal information is handled with strict confidentiality, except in exceptional circumstances where disclosure is necessary to protect the patient or third parties. This approach seeks to create a safe environment where patients can express their concerns without fear of stigmatization or discrimination.¹²

In the political context, the law was promoted as part of a campaign to modernize the mental health system, reflecting a commitment to human rights and social justice. During the campaign, cases of abuse and neglect in psychiatric institutions were highlighted, underscoring the need for a robust legal framework that protects patients and promotes ethical practices.

Considering the factors previously mentioned, it is important to develop the aspects associated with psychological suffering, although commonly understood as emotional or mental pain, it covers a wide range of experiences that affect the functionality and well-being of individuals. The Mental Health Law No. 19,529 recognizes psychological suffering as an integral dimension of health, which requires adequate attention and treatment.¹³

A crucial technical aspect of managing psychological distress is the comprehensive assessment of patients. Mental health professionals must use diagnostic and assessment tools that consider not only clinical symptoms but also socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental factors that contribute to distress. This comprehensive approach allows for the design of personalized treatment plans that address the specific needs of each patient.¹³

The treatment of psychological suffering must also be interdisciplinary. The law promotes collaboration between psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and other health professionals to provide comprehensive care. This comprehensive care model facilitates the identification of the underlying causes of suffering and the implementation of more effective interventions.¹³

The political campaign that preceded the enactment of the Act emphasized the importance of addressing mental distress at all stages of life, from childhood to old age. Preventive and educational programs were promoted to reduce the incidence of mental disorders and improve the community's capacity to respond to mental distress.¹⁴

Thus, ethics in mental health and the management of psychological suffering are essential elements in the implementation of Mental Health Law No. 19,529 in Uruguay. The law not only establishes a legal framework to protect patients' rights but also promotes clinical practices that address psychological suffering in a comprehensive and ethical manner. These reforms demonstrate a commitment to human dignity and improving the quality of life of all citizens.

Thus, mental health is an essential component of overall well-being, and its proper management is critical to the development of a healthy society. Uruguay's Mental Health Law represents a significant effort to address the population's mental health needs, but its success depends largely on how it is perceived and implemented. This research provides a critical assessment of the political discourses surrounding the Law, which can help identify areas for improvement and ensure that mental health policies are effective and well-received by the community.⁴

From an economic perspective, mental health has a significant impact on a society's productivity and economic well-being. Well-designed mental health policies can reduce healthcare costs, increase labor productivity, and improve the quality of life of individuals with mental distress. This requires trained human resources, budgets, and a shift from a shelter/hospital perspective to a community perspective. This study, by analyzing political discourse, can offer recommendations for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of mental health policies, thus contributing to Uruguay's economic and social development.⁴

Likewise, this research has particular relevance to the fields of psychology, nursing, medicine, and sociology—in other words, to the entire health field—as it provides a deeper understanding of how sociopolitical factors influence the perception and management of mental health. Mental health professionals can use the findings of this study to develop more effective interventions and advocate for policies that truly benefit the population. Integrating a psychosocial-

cultural perspective into the analysis of political discourses enriches the debate and provides a critical dimension that is often overlooked.

The methodology used in this research, which includes discourse analysis and evaluation of media coverage, allows for a comprehensive understanding of how political narratives are constructed and disseminated. This multidimensional approach is essential for capturing the complexity of the issue and offering evidence-based recommendations. The combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis strengthens the validity of the findings and provides a solid foundation for future research.

Finally, and as previously mentioned, research on political discourses surrounding the Mental Health Law in Uruguay has the potential to influence the design and implementation of mental health policies in other contexts. By providing a detailed and critical analysis of discursive strategies and their impact, this study can serve as a model for similar research in other disciplines. The transfer of knowledge and experience is fundamental to global progress in the field of mental health, with a focus on community mental health.⁵

Thus, this research is essential for understanding and improving mental health management in Uruguay. Its critical and multidimensional approach offers in-depth insight into the challenges and opportunities in mental health policy implementation, and its findings can have a significant impact on practice and policy both locally and globally.

Background

Below is a review of the various background information related to the research of interest. First, there is the research conducted by Castellano, Herrera, Heinzen, and Alfonso, entitled “Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health in Uruguay.” This study analyzes the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of the Uruguayan population. Through surveys and interviews, the authors identified a significant increase in anxiety, depression, and stress levels among different demographic groups. The research highlights how factors such as social isolation, economic uncertainty, and fear of illness contributed to the deterioration of mental health.⁴

Furthermore, the study evaluates the health system’s responses and the policies implemented to mitigate these effects. The authors point out the need to strengthen mental health services and design more inclusive policies that consider the socioeconomic and cultural factors that affect the population’s psychological well-being. The study concludes that it is crucial to continue monitoring these impacts as the situation evolves.

The study by Castellano et al.⁴ analyzes how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the mental health of the Uruguayan population. Its connection to the proposed research lies in how public health crises, such as the pandemic, can influence political discourses on mental health. This study provides a critical context for understanding how policies and discourses during times of crisis can affect public perceptions and policies on mental health, highlighting the importance of well-informed and effective political discourse.

Secondly, there is Kaplún’s work, entitled “Policies, Discourses and Narratives in Communication.” This paper explores how communication policies and public discourses shape social and political narratives in Uruguay. The author analyzes a variety of media and political discourses, highlighting how they are used to influence public opinion and political decisions. The focus is on the intersection of communication, power, and politics, providing a solid theoretical framework for understanding these dynamics.⁵

Kaplún also addresses the influence of the media on the perception of critical social issues, such as mental health. By examining specific cases, the author shows how media narratives can perpetuate stigma or, conversely, promote greater understanding and acceptance of mental health policies. This work is essential for understanding the communication context in which mental health policies are developed in Uruguay.

Through the analysis of this research, we will be able to understand how political narratives are constructed and manipulated through the media. This work provides a solid foundation for understanding the relationship between communication, power, and politics, and how these dynamics influence public perceptions of mental health.

Thirdly, there is the research carried out by Dotti, entitled “Mental Health in Uruguay: Law 19,529 from its implementation to the present.” The author This article analyzes the evolution and impact of Mental Health Law 19,529 in Uruguay, from its enactment to the present. Structural changes and reforms in the mental health system were examined, assessing how these have affected the quality and accessibility of services. The research is based on statistical data, interviews with health professionals, and patient testimonies.⁶

The author It highlights both the progress and shortcomings in the implementation of the Law, pointing out areas where greater attention and resources are needed. Among the achievements are deinstitutionalization and the promotion of a community-based approach to mental health care. However, significant challenges are also identified, such as the lack of specialized personnel and limitations in healthcare infrastructure.

Taking this into account, it is important to highlight that Dotti offers a detailed analysis of Law No. 19,529, assessing its impact since its implementation. This work is directly relevant to the research, as it allows for an examination of how political discourses have influenced the application of the law. The study identifies achievements and challenges in implementation, providing a basis for assessing how political discourses may have facilitated or hindered these processes, and where improvements are needed.

Continuing with the development of the background, there is the research carried out by Dotti and Otárola, entitled “Mental health and patient safety according to Law 19,529, which proposes deinstitutionalization.” This paper addresses the relationship between patient safety and the implementation of Law 19,529, focusing on the deinstitutionalization process. Dotti and Otárola explore how the transition from an institutional model to a community-based approach affects patient safety and well-being. Using case studies and policy analysis, the authors identify the risks and benefits associated with this shift.⁷

The authors argue that while deinstitutionalization has reduced stigma and improved patients’ social integration, it has also presented challenges in terms of continuity of care and available resources. They recommend additional policies to ensure a smooth and sustainable transition, including ongoing training for health care workers and strengthening community services.

Finally, there is the work by Dorta, entitled “Foucauldian devices and mental health in Uruguay.” The author uses Michel Foucault’s theoretical framework to analyze mental health in Uruguay, focusing on how power and knowledge mechanisms influence mental health practices and policies. Dorta studies the history of mental health policies in the country and how these have been shaped by discourses of power and control. This historical-critical analysis provides a deep

understanding of the underlying dynamics that have shaped mental health care.⁸

The study also addresses the practical implications of these devices on the lives of patients and healthcare professionals. The author highlights how power structures can perpetuate inequalities and limitations in mental healthcare, and proposes a reorientation toward more inclusive and equitable practices. This work is crucial for understanding the political and social dimensions of mental healthcare in Uruguay.

Dorta's study uses Michel Foucault's theoretical framework to analyze mental health in Uruguay, focusing on the mechanisms of power and knowledge. This perspective is essential for the research, as it allows political discourses to be contextualized within a broader power structure. Furthermore, it highlights the practical implications of these discourses on the lives of patients and health professionals, providing a deep understanding of the political and social dimensions of mental health.

Analysis

Discursive strategies used by political actors

Considering the information gathered, it is important to highlight that various discursive strategies have been employed in relation to the Mental Health Law, with the aim of influencing public perception and gaining support during electoral campaigns. These strategies are essential for understanding how mental health policies are shaped and communicated, and how these narratives impact public opinion and the implementation of the Law.

One of the most common strategies is the appeal to emotion. Political speeches often include personal stories and testimonies of individuals affected by mental health issues. These narratives seek to generate empathy and solidarity among the electorate, humanizing the problem and highlighting the importance of the law. For example, politicians may share stories of families who have faced challenges due to the lack of adequate mental health services, emphasizing the need for legislation to address these shortcomings. This strategy not only seeks to persuade the audience but also to mobilize emotional support for the cause.²

Similarly, the use of statistics and scientific data is another key strategy. Political actors present figures on the prevalence of mental disorders and the costs associated with the lack of adequate care to legitimize their proposals and demonstrate the need for the Law. For example, they may cite studies showing the increase in depression and anxiety diagnoses in the population, or the economic costs of the lack of adequate treatment. These statistics are used to support arguments in favor of the Law, providing an objective, auditable, and quantifiable basis for policy proposals.

The construction of narratives that highlight the benefits or risks associated with the Law is another important discursive strategy. Political actors craft narratives highlighting how the Law would improve the quality of life of people with mental disorders, reducing long-term healthcare costs and promoting a more inclusive and supportive society. On the other hand, they may also emphasize the risks of not implementing the Law, such as the increased burden on health services and the negative impact on the economy and social well-being. These narratives seek to convince the electorate of the Law's importance and urgency.⁵

Political actors also use multi-channel communication strategies to amplify their messages. This includes using social media,

traditional media, and public events to disseminate their discourse and reach a wider audience. Social media, in particular, enables direct and personalized communication with voters, facilitating the dissemination of emotional stories and impactful statistics. Traditional media, such as television and radio, are used to reach wider and more diverse audiences, ensuring that the message reaches all segments of the population.¹⁶

These discursive strategies have a significant impact on public opinion. Appealing to emotion can generate an empathetic response and mobilize support for the law, while the use of statistics and scientific data provides a rational basis for policy proposals. Constructing narratives about the benefits and risks associated with the law helps shape public perceptions and create a sense of urgency and necessity. Together, these strategies contribute to building a social consensus around the Mental Health Law and promoting its acceptance and support.⁵

Despite the effectiveness of these strategies, there are also challenges and limitations. Appeals to emotion can be perceived as manipulative if not handled carefully, and the overuse of statistics can be overwhelming or disconnected from people's everyday experiences. Furthermore, the construction of narratives can be influenced by political and media biases, which can distort public perceptions and generate misinformation. Therefore, it is essential that political actors balance these strategies with honest and transparent communication to maintain the trust of the electorate.¹³

To improve political communication about the Mental Health Act, it is recommended that political actors use a balanced approach that combines emotional appeals with the use of statistics and scientific data. It is important that personal stories are presented authentically and respectfully, and that statistics are explained clearly and accessibly. Furthermore, it is crucial that narratives about the benefits and risks of the law are based on solid evidence and communicated transparently and honestly.⁷

The media plays a crucial role in amplifying and disseminating political discourse. It is necessary for the media to act as responsible intermediaries, providing balanced and objective coverage of the debates surrounding the Act. The media should avoid sensationalism and misinformation and instead focus on providing accurate and contextualized information that helps the public understand the key aspects of the Act and its impact.

Citizen participation is another essential aspect for the success of the Mental Health Law. Political actors must foster an open and participatory dialogue with citizens, listening to their concerns and opinions and responding constructively. Including citizens' voices in the political debate can enrich the proposals and ensure that the Law reflects the needs and priorities of the population.⁴

Considering what has been developed so far, it is important to highlight that the discursive strategies used by political actors in relation to the Mental Health Law in Uruguay are diverse and complex. Appeals to emotion, the use of statistics and scientific data, and the construction of narratives about the benefits and risks of the Law are powerful tools for influencing public perception and gaining support during electoral campaigns. However, it is crucial that these strategies be used in a balanced and responsible manner, and that they be complemented by honest and transparent communication. The media and citizen participation also play a fundamental role in this process, ensuring that the debate on the Mental Health Law is informed, constructive, and oriented toward social well-being.¹⁰

Evaluation of the amplification or distortion of speeches by the media

The media plays a fundamental role in amplifying or distorting political discourses about the Mental Health Law, significantly influencing public perception and the development of the electoral campaign. In many cases, the media act as intermediaries that select, interpret, and present political discourses in ways that can reinforce or alter the original message. Media coverage can amplify certain aspects of the discourse, such as emotional testimonies or alarming statistics, while downplaying other elements, such as concrete policy proposals. This selection and presentation of information can create a biased perception of the Law and its implications, affecting public opinion and acceptance of Law No. 19,529. Furthermore, the tendency of some media outlets to seek sensationalism can distort political discourses, presenting mental health as a constant crisis rather than an area requiring attention and long-term sustainable policies.⁷

The amplification of certain elements in political speeches is a strategy commonly used by the media to capture public attention. Emotional testimonies, for example, are frequently highlighted to generate an empathetic response and mobilize support for the law. These testimonies, although powerful, can divert attention from the more technical and complex aspects of the legislation, simplifying the debate and reducing the depth of public discussion. By emphasizing personal stories, the media can create a narrative that resonates emotionally with the audience, but that does not necessarily reflect the totality of the arguments and evidence presented by political actors.

On the other hand, downplaying specific elements, such as concrete policy proposals, can limit public understanding of the Act and its implications. By failing to provide detailed analysis of the proposals, the media can contribute to a superficial perception of the legislation, where voters lack access to the information necessary to make informed decisions.¹⁵ This lack of depth in media coverage can result in public opinion based on impressions and emotions, rather than a critical and grounded understanding of the Act.

Information bias is another crucial factor in the distortion of political discourse. The media, whether intentionally or not, may present information in a way that favors certain perspectives or interests. This bias can manifest itself in the selection of which aspects of the discourse are highlighted and which are omitted, as well as in the interpretation and contextualization of political messages. For example, a media outlet may choose to emphasize alarming statistics about the prevalence of mental disorders to create a sense of urgency, while downplaying the solutions proposed by the Act. This approach can influence public perception, generating support for or rejection of the Act based on a partial representation of the facts.⁵

The sensationalist approach of some media outlets can also distort political discourse on the Mental Health Act. Presenting mental health as a constant crisis can attract public attention and increase viewership, but it can also perpetuate stigmas and misunderstandings about mental health. This sensationalist approach can divert attention from real needs and sustainable solutions, focusing instead on dramatic and alarming aspects that do not reflect the complexity of the issue. Portraying mental health as a perpetual crisis can generate fear and anxiety in the population, hindering the implementation of effective and sustainable policies.⁶

Furthermore, media coverage can influence public perceptions of political actors and their proposals. The media has the power to shape the image of politicians, presenting them as committed advocates for mental health or, conversely, as opportunists who use the issue to win

votes. This representation can affect the credibility and support for political actors, influencing the outcome of electoral campaigns. The way the media portrays politicians and their speeches can strengthen or undermine public confidence in the Law and its proponents.

The interaction between the media and political discourse is complex and multifaceted. The media not only act as transmitters of information, but also as creators of meaning, interpreting and contextualizing political messages in ways that influence public perception. This ability of the media to shape the public narrative underscores the importance of responsible and balanced media coverage. The media should strive to provide a complete and accurate representation of political discourse, avoiding sensationalism and bias, and promoting informed and constructive debate.⁶

To mitigate the negative effects of media amplification and distortion, it is crucial that political actors and the media work together to improve the quality of information presented to the public. Politicians must strive to communicate their proposals in a clear and accessible manner, providing data and evidence to support their arguments. At the same time, the media must commit to balanced and objective coverage, avoiding sensationalism and providing critical and contextualized analysis of political speeches.

Thus, the way the media selects, interprets, and presents information can significantly influence public perception and the conduct of the electoral campaign. It is essential that both political actors and the media work together to promote honest, transparent, and balanced communication, enabling citizens to make informed decisions and engage in constructive debate about mental health and its policies.

Recommendations for improving political communication on mental health issues

To promote a more informed and constructive debate on the Mental Health Act, it is essential to improve political communication in several ways. First, it is recommended that political actors use clear and accessible language, avoiding technicalities and terms that may be confusing to the general public. Clarity in communication is essential to ensure that all segments of the population understand the key aspects of the Act and its implications. Accessible language facilitates citizen participation and allows people to feel included in the debate, regardless of their level of prior knowledge on the subject.⁶

Furthermore, it is crucial that speeches are based on scientific evidence and verifiable data, presenting accurate and contextualized information about mental health and the law. The use of scientific data not only legitimizes policy proposals but also provides a solid basis for public debate.¹² Policy actors must ensure that the information presented is understandable and relevant to the audience, avoiding an overload of technical data that can be overwhelming. Contextualizing data is equally important, as it allows the audience to understand how the Law will impact their daily lives and society in general.¹¹

Politicians should also encourage the participation of mental health experts and/or specialists in public debate, ensuring that proposals and arguments are supported by specialized knowledge. This inclusion provides an informed and evidence-based perspective, which can enrich the debate and increase the credibility of policy proposals. Mental health experts can help demystify the issue by providing accurate information and challenging the stigmas and misunderstandings that often surround mental health. Furthermore, their participation can ensure that proposed policies are effective and aligned with international best practices and standards.³

On the other hand, the media must commit to balanced and responsible coverage, avoiding sensationalism and providing space for critical analysis and informed discussion. The media have a crucial role in shaping public opinion and should strive to present an accurate and balanced representation of the debates surrounding the Mental Health Act. Sensationalism can distort public perception and generate unnecessary fear or anxiety, while balanced coverage can foster a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the issue. The media must provide space for critical analysis, allowing different perspectives to be heard and constructively debated.⁹

Similarly, the implementation of educational campaigns to raise awareness among the population about the importance of mental health and the benefits of Law No. 19,529 is suggested, promoting a deeper understanding and stronger support for mental health policies. Educational campaigns can play a crucial role in reducing the stigma associated with mental health and promoting a culture of support and understanding. These campaigns should be designed to be accessible and relevant to different segments of the population, using a variety of media and formats to reach the widest possible audience.¹⁴

It is important to note that educational campaigns should not only focus on information about the Act, but also address common myths and misunderstandings about mental health. Public education can help change attitudes and behaviors toward people with mental disorders, promoting inclusion and support. Furthermore, political campaigns can provide practical information on how to access mental health services and what resources are available for those who need them.¹⁷

Collaboration between political actors, mental health experts, and the media is essential to the success of these recommendations. Each group has a unique and complementary role in promoting informed and constructive debate on the Mental Health Act. Political actors have a responsibility to lead with clear, evidence-based proposals; experts must provide technical knowledge and perspective; and the media must act as responsible intermediaries facilitating dialogue and public understanding.

Furthermore, it is crucial to establish mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of communication strategies and educational campaigns. Community feedback and ongoing evaluation can help adjust and improve initiatives, ensuring that the desired objectives are achieved. Transparency in the evaluation process can also increase public confidence in policies and the actors involved.⁹

Taking into account the findings, it is extremely important to emphasize that improving political communication on mental health issues requires a multifaceted approach that combines clarity, scientific evidence, expert participation, responsible media coverage, and effective educational campaigns. By adopting these recommendations, a more informed and constructive debate on the Mental Health Act can be fostered, fostering a deeper understanding and stronger support for mental health policies. This approach will not only benefit people with mental disorders but will also contribute to the creation of a more inclusive and supportive society.

Conclusion

Considering the findings of this paper, it is important to highlight that the analysis of political discourse on the Mental Health Law in Uruguay reveals the complexity and importance of political communication in shaping public opinion and implementing mental health policies. Political actors have used various discursive strategies, such as appealing to emotions, using statistics and scientific data, and constructing narratives about the benefits and risks of the Law, to influence public perception and gain support during electoral

campaigns. These strategies have proven effective in mobilizing emotional and rational support, although they also present challenges and limitations that must be addressed.

Appealing to emotion has been a powerful tool for generating empathy and solidarity among the electorate, humanizing the issue of mental health and highlighting the importance of the law. However, this strategy can be perceived as manipulative if not handled carefully, and can divert attention from the more technical and complex aspects of the legislation. It is crucial that political actors balance appealing to emotion with presenting accurate, evidence-based information to maintain the electorate's trust.

The use of statistics and scientific data has provided an objective and quantifiable basis for policy proposals, legitimizing arguments in favor of the law and demonstrating the need for legislation to address the gaps in mental health services. However, the overload of technical data can be overwhelming for the general public, and it is essential that policymakers present information in a clear and accessible manner, contextualizing the data to facilitate understanding.

The construction of narratives about the benefits and risks of the law has been fundamental in shaping public perception and creating a sense of urgency and need. These narratives have helped build social consensus around the Mental Health Law, promoting its acceptance and support. However, it is important that these narratives be based on solid evidence and communicated transparently and honestly to avoid distorting public perception.

The media has played a crucial role in amplifying and distorting political discourse, significantly influencing public perception and the conduct of the electoral campaign. Media coverage can amplify certain aspects of the discourse, such as emotional testimonies or alarming statistics, while downplaying other elements, such as concrete policy proposals. This selection and presentation of information can create a biased perception of the law and its implications, affecting public opinion and acceptance of Law 19.529.

Reporting bias and sensationalism by some media outlets can distort political discourse, presenting mental health as a constant crisis rather than an area requiring long-term attention and sustainable policies. It is essential that the media commit to balanced and responsible coverage, providing a space for critical analysis and informed discussion, and avoiding sensationalism and misinformation.

To improve political communication on the Mental Health Law, it is suggested that political actors use clear and accessible language, avoiding technicalities and terms that are confusing to the general public. Furthermore, it is crucial that speeches be based on scientific evidence and verifiable data, presenting accurate and contextualized information about mental health and the law. The participation of mental health experts in public debate is essential to ensure that proposals and arguments are supported by specialized knowledge.

The media must commit to balanced and responsible coverage, avoiding sensationalism and providing a space for critical analysis and informed discussion. The implementation of educational campaigns that raise public awareness about the importance of mental health and the benefits of Law No. 19,529 is also essential to promoting a deeper understanding and stronger support for mental health policies.

As mentioned during the research, collaboration between political actors, mental health experts, and the media is essential to the success of these recommendations. Each group has a unique and complementary role in promoting informed and constructive debate on the Mental Health Act. Political actors must lead with clear, evidence-based proposals, experts must provide technical knowledge

and perspective, and the media must act as responsible intermediaries facilitating dialogue and public understanding.

Finally, it is essential to establish mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of communication strategies and educational campaigns. Community feedback and ongoing evaluation can help adjust and improve initiatives, ensuring that the desired objectives are achieved. Transparency in the evaluation process can also increase public confidence in policies and the actors involved.

Thus, the analysis of political discourse on the Mental Health Law in Uruguay highlights the importance of clear, evidence-based, and expert-backed political communication, as well as the need for balanced and responsible media coverage. By adopting these recommendations, a more informed and constructive debate on the Mental Health Law can be fostered, fostering a deeper understanding and stronger support for mental health policies. This approach will not only benefit people with mental disorders but will also contribute to the creation of a more inclusive and supportive society.

Suggestions and recommendations

The analysis suggests recommendations aimed at strengthening the relationship between political discourse, the media, and public policies regarding Mental Health Law No. 19,529. First, it is essential for political actors to use clear, inclusive language based on scientific evidence, avoiding the electoral exploitation of psychological suffering. Clear communication and transparency are key factors for fostering public trust and reducing social polarization around the issue.⁶

Likewise, it is recommended to expand the participation of users, family members, and social organizations in the design and implementation of policies, in order to legitimize the processes and ensure their social relevance. The inclusion of diverse voices enriches the debate and guarantees greater representation in the definition of priorities.⁷

Secondly, it is considered relevant to integrate the gender and human rights perspective into discourses and practices, in accordance with the international standards established by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the recommendations of the World Health Organization.^{15,16} This approach addresses historical inequalities in access to and treatment of mental health, as well as promoting care focused on the dignity and autonomy of individuals.¹⁴

The media, for their part, should take an active role in responsible coverage of mental health, avoiding sensationalist approaches and promoting informed narratives that contribute to reducing stigma.⁹ To this end, it is pertinent to train journalists on health and human rights issues, in line with what Kaplún proposed regarding the role of communication narratives in shaping social imaginaries.⁵

Finally, it is suggested to consolidate the practical implementation of the Law by allocating adequate resources and strengthening community mechanisms, as indicated by various studies on deinstitutionalization in the country.^{13,17} In turn, it is recommended to establish continuous evaluation mechanisms that allow measuring the impact of policies and provide feedback to the public debate.¹⁸ These actions would promote a comprehensive and ethical approach to mental health, transforming political discourse into tools for sustainable social change.

Acknowledgments

None.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares there is no conflict of interest.

References

1. Exposto E. Critical Theory of “Mental Health”: Towards a Politics of the Symptomatic. *Critique and Resistance*. 2024;(18):128–124.
2. Guerrero N, José M. Theoretical reflections on political discourse and ideology: A preliminary analysis of the entrepreneurship policies of the Piñera administration (Chile 2010–2014). *Revista Uruguaya de Ciencia Política*. 2024;24(2):1–9.
3. González C. The Mental Health Situation in Uruguay and the Applicability of Mental Health Law No. 19,529 in the Context of the Health, Social, and Economic Emergency Caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic | SIFP. 2024. p. 1–50.
4. Castellano G, Herrera G, Heinzen J, et al. Impact of COVID-19 on mental health in Uruguay. *Alerta, Scientific journal of the National Institute of Health*. 2024;6(2):125–32.
5. Kaplún G. Policies, Discourses, and Narratives in Communication. University of the Republic: LICCOM-UdelaR, Montevideo (Uruguay), 2011.
6. Dotti G. Mental Health in Uruguay: Law 19,529 from its implementation to the present. *RUE*. 2024;19(1).
7. Dotti G, Otárola A. Mental health and patient safety according to Law 19,529, which proposes deinstitutionalization. *Revista Urug Enferm*. 2023;18(1): e506.
8. Dorta G. Foucauldian Devices and Mental Health in Uruguay. *Nuevo Itinerario*. 2024;18(2):1–18.
9. Ortiz I. Emotional effects of sensationalism on information recipients. Miguel Hernández University of Elche. Faculty of Social and Legal Sciences of Elche. Journalism Degree. 2017.
10. Medical Federation of the Interior. Analysis of Law 19529: Mental Health. Association of Psychiatrists of the Interior. 2018.
11. Grippi F. Speeches on the Debate over the Mental Health Bill in Uruguay (2015–2017). 2018.
12. Grippi F. Between Being and What Should Be: Discourses on the Debate over the Mental Health Bill (2015–2017). 2019.
13. Barrán JP. Deinstitutionalization in Uruguay: A Historical and Social Analysis. *Journal of Psychiatry and Mental Health*. 2021.
14. Aguiar S. The reform of the Mental Health Law in Uruguay: A critical approach. *Journal of Social Sciences*. 2022.
15. Molas A. Human Rights and Mental Health: The Impact of Mental Health Law No. 19,529 in Uruguay. *Journal of Human Rights and Health*. 2023.
16. De León N. The Evolution of Mental Health in Uruguay: From the Psychopath Law to Mental Health Law No. 19,529. *Journal of Health History*. 2023.
17. Fernández Castrillo B. The struggle for the rights of people with psychosocial disabilities in Uruguay. *Journal of Psychiatry and Human Rights*. 2023.
18. González C. Deinstitutionalization and the Mental Health Law in Uruguay: A Critical Analysis. *Journal of Health Policies*. 2023.