

“NCDs affect rich & poor alike, not the disease of aged anymore”

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By : Rahul Koul - September 13, 2017



Project HOPE is a global health development and disaster relief organization headquartered in Millwood, Virginia, USA. In India, it works closely with government and key stakeholders to achieve India’s public health goals besides improving specific public health challenges related to non-communicable diseases. In this exclusive interaction, Dr Laxmikant Palo, Regional Director-SE Asia & Country Director-India shared his opinion on the healthcare scenario, policy aspects related to NCDs and way forward



How do you look at the overall healthcare scenario in India?

The recent approval of the National Health Policy 2017 by the Union Cabinet is a very positive step towards a better health care access and system in India. The last health policy was issued 15 years ago in 2002. The policy proposes raising public health expenditure to 2.5 percent of the GDP in a time-bound manner. The policy intends to increase life expectancy at birth from 67.5 to 70 by 2025 and reduce infant mortality rate to 28 by 2019. It also aims to reduce under five mortality to 23 by the year 2025. Besides, it intends to achieve the global 2020 HIV target. The foremost attention need to be on addressing the implementation challenges. This required key stakeholders engagement to work together to operationalize the policy at all level.



What are the biggest challenges that India faces because of non-communicable diseases?

The Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) are the largest contributors for mortality and morbidity around world. The burden and threat of NCDs constitutes a major public health challenge that undermines social and economic development of India. NCDs affect rich and poor alike. A decade ago, NCD was a disease of aged. Now the trend is changing because of lifestyle changes and culturally and climatically inappropriate food habits and environmental changes make the younger generation in their productive age group affected with the condition. If not checked right now uncontrolled NCD explosion may affect the economy of the country. NCDs will be a huge burden unless the country prioritise for a carefully planned evidence based control initiatives.



Where do we stand on the framing of right policies and the implementation of solutions at ground level?

Scientific knowledge demonstrates that the NCDs burden can be greatly reduced if cost-effective preventive and curative actions, along with interventions for prevention and control of NCDs are implemented in an effective manner. Government of India had launched various vertical programmes such as National Cancer Control Programmes, National Tobacco Control Programme, National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, CVD and Stroke (NPCDCS) etc. Strong surveillance, monitoring and evaluation system is required for successful implementation of the programmes.



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How would you rank the top 5 major NCDs from top to bottom in the Indian context?

As per WHO 2014 estimates, the NCDs accounts for 60 percent of deaths in India. Based on available evidence cardiovascular diseases (26 percent), chronic respiratory diseases (13 percent), cancer (7 percent) and diabetes (2 percent) are the leading cause of mortality in India.



Which category of Indians is at the major risk? What contributes to that risk?

The probability of an Indian, in the age group of 30-70 years, dying at present from the four main NCDs – diabetes, cancer, stroke and respiratory problems – is 26 percent. The death toll due to NCDs would amount to 52 million in 2030 compared to 38 million in 2012.



What are the major objectives of Project HOPE in India and the immediate priorities?

Project HOPE (Health Opportunities for People Everywhere) works towards lasting solutions to global health problems, transforming the public health landscape on ground. We enable

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health workers to have the greatest positive impact on the health of the people they serve.

We work closely with government and key stakeholders to contribute to specific public health challenges related to Non-Communicable Diseases(NCDs), women and child health and nutrition, infectious diseases and health system strengthening. Our Vision is a world where everyone has the health care needed to reach life's full potential.