

## PFCD lauds government initiatives to address growing NCD burden

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**New Delhi:** A day after the Union Ministry of Health & Family Welfare launched several key initiatives to address the growing burden of non communicable diseases in India, the [Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease](#) (PFCD) on June 23 called upon the government to initiate a comprehensive approach to reduce the burgeoning out-of-pocket expenditure associated with treatment of NCDs.

Public health experts have for long been demanding a multi-sectoral and comprehensive approach and proactive strategies to counter the changing disease profile – moving from communicable to NCDs such as cancer, diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular conditions. Today, NCDs account for 53 per cent of disease burden and 60 per cent of the total deaths in India.

According to Dr Kenneth E. Thorpe, Chairman, PFCD, “The steps announced by Union Health & Family Welfare minister JP Nadda are commendable, and a clear indication of the government’s long-term commitment to find sustainable solutions to address the growing burden of NCDs. What’s required for the government now is to realise the importance of increasing investments on healthcare.” Dr Thorpe is the [Robert W. Woodruff Professor](#) of Health Policy, and the Chair of the Department of Health Policy and Management in the Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University, and has been leading efforts in India for the past several years to initiate a multi-sectoral response to address the growing NCD burden.

Highlighting that SANKALP — a national blueprint released last year by PFCD in India – had

recommended several of the many measures initiated by the government now, Dr Thorpe commented, "Saving the nation from the growing human and economic toll of chronic disease requires a realistic policy intervention, efficient surveillance, robust healthcare financing systems and strengthening the existing healthcare systems. Expanding health insurance for Indian citizens, especially to cover primary care services for chronic conditions, will need a multi-payer approach to ensure all patients receive timely access to quality health care to prevent the progression of diabetes, cardiovascular disease and other chronic diseases."

"Poverty is a significant risk factor for contracting NCDs, and these diseases can quickly lead to personal financial crises. Because of the limited availability of healthcare coverage and low public expenditure on health in India, an estimated 60-70% of healthcare services are paid out-of-pocket," Dr Thorpe said, explaining that given the reliance on out-of-pocket costs, preventive care and early opportunities to manage health risks are often forgone, leading to greater severity of disease, higher costs for the individual, and significant economic losses for society as a whole.

"National investments are required to mobilise resources, improve health, protect individuals from financial hardship in the event of a catastrophic illness, and to achieve efficiency and equity in providing healthcare. Investment in NCDs should be considered as a poverty alleviation and development initiative because such investments generate significant national returns by reducing pre-mature mortality, increase in productive years of life, and reduced costs of managing chronic illnesses," he said.