

Dr. Harsh Vardhan launches Decade of Healthy Ageing (2020-2030) on International Day for Older Persons

“Longitudinal Aging Study of India (LASI) will provide evidence base for national and state level programs and policies for elderly population”

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Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister for Health & Family Welfare restated commitment of the Government to healthy ageing today on the occasion of International Day for Older Persons. Every year 1st October is celebrated as the International Day of Older Persons, as declared by United Nations, to recognize, enable and expand the contributions of older people in their families, communities and societies at large and to raise awareness towards issues of ageing.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan spoke of the National Programme for the Health Care for the Elderly (NPHCE) which is aimed to deliver comprehensive, affordable and quality geriatric care services at primary and secondary levels; “outpatient services from district hospital to health & wellness centres, minimum 10 bedded geriatric wards at all district hospitals, rehabilitation services down to CHC and HWC level and developing mechanisms for providing home based care to needy elderly.” He elaborated how this would feed into secondary and tertiary institutions through a continuum of care approach. He stated that “19 Regional Geriatric Centres in medical colleges and two National Centres for Ageing are envisioned to render specialized geriatric care through strong cross referrals, developing a strong workforce of geriatricians and geriatric care providers, both medical and paramedical, impart caregiving skills to family members and professionals and carry out need based operational research.”

The Union Health Minister also stated that as 1st October, 2020 is the launch year of Decade of Healthy Ageing (2020-2030), many activities will be undertaken throughout the year, aimed at mainstreaming issues related to elderly and to deliberate upon ways to ensure better and effective delivery of services, making full use of convergence mechanisms. “This initiative is an opportunity to bring together governments, civil society, international agencies, professionals, academia, the media, and the private sector for concerted, catalytic and collaborative action to improve the lives of older people, their families, and the communities in which they live,” he added.

The Minister affirmed that the broad aims of the Decade of Healthy Ageing will include evolving convergence within various national health programs and also promoting inter-sectoral coordination with other line Departments/Ministries. Community based organisations, NGOs and multinational agencies will also be involved for developing an implementation framework for multi-sectoral engagement on healthy aging. “Discussions/workshops/webinars with experts/academic bodies/professionals will be organised to bring out policy and programmatic responses to LASI data, highlighting the best practices for elder care and exploring effective means of promoting and strengthening the participation of older persons in various aspects of social, cultural, economic and civic and political life.”

Highlighting the importance of the Longitudinal Aging Study in India (LASI), he said, “With well-designed and judicious investments, ageing population can help build-up human, social, economic and environmental capital. However, this would call for investing in all the phases of life, fostering enabling societies, and creating flexible but vibrant for building a society for all ages. For this to happen, formulation of policies and programmes of the Government, or any modifications therein to improve their reach and delivery, need to be evidence based. In order to generate comprehensive data on social, economic and health conditions of the elderly, the Government undertook Longitudinal Aging Study of India, the first nationwide study and world’s largest study on older adults which will provide evidence base for national and state level programs and policies for elderly population.” Findings of LASI are being finalised by the Ministry and will be released shortly.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan also spoke on the emergence of COVID-19 as a public health challenge which has caused an upheaval across the country and the world. The UN theme of the International Day of Older Persons 2020 is “Pandemics: Do They Change How We Address Age and Ageing?”. Considering the higher risks faced by elderly during the outbreak of pandemics such as COVID-19, Government has responded to address their concerns by recognising them as vulnerable population category for COVID efforts, issuing advisories, raising awareness of their special needs, encouraging State Governments to develop need-based models for delivery of medications and home-based care to the elderly.

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