

PRESS NOTE

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Agewell Foundation appeals for setting up National Commission for Older Persons to empower the ever-increasing elderly population

In India, the status of health insurance coverage in old age is very depressing. Several studies suggest that the penetration of health insurance in old age is approximately 4% in India. Latest study conducted by Agewell Foundation confirms that with low health insurance coverage, the **elderly have limited Access to Healthcare**, which affects their lives adversely. A study submitted at the United Nations also reveals that the situation of healthcare and social inclusion in old age is deteriorating rapidly due to many factors, like the increasing life span in old age, fast-changing family and value system, increasing cost of living, etc.

The national level study, titled **Right To Health And Access To Health Services In Old Age - Social Inclusion -March 2023**, was conducted specially for the **13th Session of Open Ended Working Group on Ageing**, held at the UN Headquarters, New York in April 2023. For the exercise, Agewell volunteers interacted with 10,000 older persons across India. The study report is also available on the United Nations' conference website: <https://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/thirteenthsession.shtml> under "*Documents submitted by NGOs*".

Salient findings of the Study;

- **62% of elderly respondents were not enjoying good health and reportedly claimed that their current health status is poor or extremely poor.**
- **According to 30.1% of respondents, existing healthcare schemes/ provisions are not adequate**
- **52.9% of elderly respondents were not satisfied with the level of access to health services in old age.**
- **Almost half of older persons (49.8%) said that they are primarily self-dependent and do not depend on their children and others for healthcare needs.**
- **During the survey, 20% of respondents said that psychological disorders are the most critical health issues in old age.**
- **18% of respondents said that most older persons face locomotor disabilities.**
- **55.5% of respondents were not satisfied with the existing social inclusion schemes for elderly**

Speaking on the occasion, **Himanshu Rath**, Founder Chairman of **Agewell Foundation** said, "*There is a huge gap between the availability, accessibility, and affordability of healthcare services in our country, particularly from the older people's point of view. Given the ever-growing elderly population, a National Commission for Older Persons has also become the need of the hour.*"

Agewell Foundation's recommendations, based on survey findings and observations

Setting up National Commission for Older Persons - National Commission could act as an autonomous body for older people and ensure that policymaking across governments considers the

long-term needs of the ageing population. The Commission can play an instrumental role in the following;

- **Formulation of an ageing population strategy:** India has a rapidly ageing population, and by 2050 every fourth person will be old (60+). This may be a cause for celebration, but policymaking is yet to adjust, to the growing needs of current and future generations of older people. The commission would be a valuable asset to the government in identifying the challenges and opportunities of an ageing population and bringing an independent, non-partisan approach to finding solutions.
- **Meeting growing ageing inequalities:** Inequality in older age groups is growing, with some groups increasingly struggling and overlooked. Already, many older people are marginalised in the labour market, dealing with poverty and ill health, and experiencing ageism in their daily lives. These issues have consequences for the economy and national productivity, and they further entrench inequalities as people age.
- **Protection of the rights of older people:** Older people, especially the most vulnerable, are easily overlooked and their rights are not regarded as well. There needs to be an independent voice to speak up and protect the rights of older people, particularly in times of crisis like pandemics, Geopolitical conflicts, national disasters, etc.
- **Perceptual change in attitude towards old people:** There is an urgent need to address some of the deep-rooted and harmful ageist stereotypes that exist in society. The Commission could play a transformational role in challenging the age discrimination that is experienced by old people. Ageism has adverse effects on the mental health, physical health, employment outcomes, and financial well-being of individuals. The Commission could promote positive attitudes towards ageing and the contribution that older people make to society. This would unlock opportunities for older people as well.

In short, the Commission will focus on how society and policymaking can enable people to age better and work towards making our country a better place to grow old.

To ensure better access to health services for older people, governments and concerned stakeholders need to focus on:

- Medical and health insurance policies/ schemes for more years in old age
- Setting up more dedicated healthcare services and facilities for older people
- Setting up a network of Caregivers for Older Persons to look after elderly patients
- Free/concessional transportation services should be provided to elderly patients
- Setting up tele-healthcare initiatives like counseling services for older people
- Setting up dedicated Mobile clinics across the country, with special care for older people.

For ensuring the social inclusion of older people, the focus should be on;

- Retired and older people should be promoted to self-employment in old age
- Organize digital literacy classes/soft skills training/retooling of retired and elderly
- Retired/older people should be given opportunities to participate in the mainstream
- Organize Social Inclusion / Social Empowerment Week or Day

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