



Research Unit
Press Information Bureau
Government of India

National Cancer Awareness Day in India

A Call to Action for Cancer Prevention, Treatment, and Innovation

“The effort is that the citizens of the whole country can get the benefits of the schemes of the central government, anywhere in the country, there should be no restriction for that. This is the spirit of One Nation, One Health”

- Prime Minister Narendra

November 7, 2024

On November 7th each year, India observes **National Cancer Awareness Day**—an initiative that aims to raise awareness about the growing cancer burden in the country and inspire action towards prevention, early detection, and treatment. India is the first country in the world to officially recognize National Cancer Awareness Day. The date was chosen not only to honor the birth of Nobel Laureate Madame Marie Curie, who discovered radioactivity and whose work has had a profound impact on cancer treatment but also to reflect India's commitment to addressing cancer as a public health priority.

India, home to over 1.4 billion people, is experiencing a rapid rise in cancer cases, largely due to lifestyle changes, tobacco use, poor dietary habits, and inadequate physical activity. According to estimates, approximately 800,000 new cancer cases are expected each year, with tobacco-related cancers accounting for as much as 35–50% of all cancers in men and 17% in women. However, various types of cancer are preventable, and through widespread awareness and timely interventions, India is significantly reducing its cancer burden.



The Growing Progress in Cancer Care in India

Cancer is one of the most pressing public health challenges India faces today. According to data from the **National Cancer Registry Programme**¹, cancer cases are expected to increase significantly, with an estimated 800,000 new diagnoses annually. Among these, tobacco-related cancers—including oral, lung, and head and neck cancers—are particularly prevalent and account for a major proportion of cancer cases. These cancers are largely preventable, underscoring the importance of early intervention, lifestyle modification, and tobacco cessation programs.

The rise in cancer cases is compounded by the fact that many patients present at advanced stages, leading to poor outcomes. India, with its diverse population and healthcare disparities, faces challenges in providing equitable access to early diagnosis and treatment. Efforts to address these gaps through improved healthcare infrastructure, public awareness campaigns, and the expansion of cancer care facilities are essential to turning the tide on this preventable disease.

❖ Addressing Risk Factors: Tobacco, Diet, and Lifestyle

India's cancer landscape is shaped by multiple lifestyle-related risk factors. Tobacco consumption, whether through smoking or chewing, is the single most significant contributor to cancer in India. It is responsible for an estimated 40–50% of cancer cases in men and 20% in women. Oral cancers, in

¹ https://ncdirindia.org/All_Reports/Report_2020/default.aspx

particular, are a major concern, with chewing tobacco being more prevalent in certain regions of the country. Govt has taken various measures to address these issues, such as:

- **Tobacco Control:** As tobacco use is a major risk factor for cancer, measures have been implemented to discourage tobacco consumption through various public health campaigns.
- **Comprehensive Primary Health Care:** The preventive aspect of cancer is strengthened through the Ayushman Bharat- Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWC) scheme, which promotes wellness activities and community-level health communication.
- **Nutrition Promotion:** The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) promotes healthy eating habits to reduce cancer risk.

❖ **National Cancer Control Programme**

The National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) was launched in 1975 and later integrated into the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases, and Stroke (NPCDCS), which has been operational since 2010. Under the National Health Mission (NHM), the NPCDCS supports state and union territories in generating awareness about cancer prevention. Financial support is provided for Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) activities to raise public awareness at the grassroots level.

As part of this initiative, 616 Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) clinics have been established at the district level, along with 3,827 such clinics at the Community Health Centre (CHC) level. Additionally, 214 Day Care Centres for Chemotherapy have been set up to provide specialized care.

The programme also includes population-based screening for common NCDs, with individuals aged 30 and above being screened for prevalent conditions, including three major cancers: breast, oral, and cervical cancer.

❖ **Recent Budgetary Measures to Improve Cancer Care**

The Union Budget for FY 2024-25 has provided a boost to cancer care in India, with an increase of approximately Rs 4,000 crore in funding for the **National Health Mission (NHM)**. This funding is directed toward improving **primary and secondary healthcare** services, which are vital for preventive cancer care and early detection. The government is also focusing on enhancing **digital public infrastructure (DPI)**, which drive innovation and productivity across healthcare, including cancer treatment and management.

Moreover, in a significant step toward improving access to cancer treatments, the **Union Finance Minister, Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman**, announced the exemption of **three critical cancer medicines**—Trastuzumab Deruxtecan, Osimertinib, and Durvalumab—from customs duty. These medicines are used to treat breast, lung, and biliary tract cancers, respectively, and their exemption has made it more affordable and accessible to patients. This initiative aims to ease the financial burden on cancer patients, making cutting-edge treatments more accessible to the Indian population.



❖ Advances in Cancer Research and Treatment

While prevention is key, progress in cancer treatment is also critical. **New approaches to cancer treatment** are emerging, such as **magnetic hyperthermia-based therapy**, which uses magnetic nanoparticles to target and destroy tumor cells with minimal side effects. This method could revolutionize cancer treatment by reducing the need for traditional chemotherapy, which often comes with severe side effects. Research conducted by Indian scientists is contributing to the development of **nanotherapy** and other innovative treatments, making it possible to treat cancers more effectively and with fewer side effects.

Additionally, India's commitment to cancer research and treatment is evident in its participation in the **Quad Cancer Moonshot**, a joint initiative between the U.S., Australia, India, and Japan aimed at ending cancer as we know it, starting with cervical cancer. India is sharing its expertise in **digital health**

through its **National Non-Communicable Disease Portal**, which tracks long-term cancer data and supports cancer prevention and control efforts across the Indo-Pacific region.

❖ **The Role of Cancer Detection and Prevention Clinics**

A key component of India's cancer control strategy is the establishment of **Cancer Detection and Prevention Clinics** in district hospitals and regional centers. These clinics provide early diagnostic services and basic treatment, helping to identify cancers at an early stage when they are most treatable. Kerala has been a leader in this initiative, successfully implementing a model where district hospitals provide a range of cancer services, including cytology and palliative care. The goal is to make cancer care more accessible and affordable, particularly in rural areas where access to specialized cancer centers is limited.

❖ **Palliative Care: Addressing Late-Stage Cancer**

With more than 75% of cancer patients in India presenting at advanced stages, **palliative care** is crucial to improving the quality of life for these individuals. Palliative care focuses on pain management, symptom relief, and providing emotional support to both patients and their families. The availability of **oral morphine** for pain relief is a key component of cancer pain management in India, and the government has made efforts to simplify regulations to ensure its availability at treatment centers across the country.

International Collaboration: A Global Fight Against Cancer

India's efforts to combat cancer are not limited to national initiatives. The **World Health Organization (WHO)** has been a key partner in India's cancer control strategy, promoting tobacco control, palliative care, and human resource development. Additionally, India's participation in international collaborations such as the **Quad Cancer Moonshot** further strengthens its role in the global fight against cancer.

India is also taking steps to provide cancer care and prevention support to neighboring countries in the Indo-Pacific region. By sharing expertise, providing screening tools, and expanding access to cancer vaccines and treatments, India is contributing to global cancer control efforts, particularly in the prevention and treatment of **cervical cancer**, which remains a major health crisis in the region.

Looking Ahead: A Comprehensive Cancer Control Strategy for India

As India observes **National Cancer Awareness Day**, the importance of **prevention, early detection, affordable treatment, and palliative care** cannot be overstated. With the increasing burden of cancer, India must continue to expand its efforts in public education, healthcare infrastructure, and research.

This will require sustained investment, collaboration between government and private sectors, and a commitment to reducing the inequities in cancer care across the country.

The government's focus on **primary healthcare, screening programs, tobacco control, and affordable treatment** is a step in the right direction. By prioritizing cancer as a public health issue and implementing strategies to prevent, detect, and treat it effectively, India can significantly reduce the cancer burden and improve outcomes for millions of individuals affected by this disease.

National Cancer Awareness Day serves as a reminder of the progress made and the road ahead in the fight against cancer. Together, we can build a future where fewer lives are lost to cancer, and those affected have access to the care and support they need.

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