Elderly Health Review

What in news?

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- The National Health Policy (NHP), 2017 is not sensitive to the needs of the elderly.
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- It overlooks the rapid rise in the percentage of the old people in the population and associated health issues.
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How does the health of the elderly fare in India?

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- “India Human Development Survey” finds that the proportions of those suffering from ‘Non-Communicable Diseases’ - NCDs nearly doubled during 2005-12 among the elderly.
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- It accounted for about a third of the above 60 populations in 2012.
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- More females than males suffered from these diseases and the percentage increases with age.
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- Numerous physiological changes also occur and the risk of chronic diseases rises.
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What are the systemic issues?

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- **Systemic issues -** The health system is ill-equipped to deal with surging NCDs.
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- Our medical personals are also not well trained to treat/advise the aged suffering from dementia or frailty.
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- There aren’t enough facilities for early diagnosis and management of conditions such as hypertension.
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- **Costs -** Hospitalisation costs are exorbitant and the challenge is compounded by the fact that earning potential of the elderly is less.
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- While private insurance is prohibitive due to costs, access to government health insurance nearly doubled in recent years.
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- But its coverage too remained low due age related barriers.
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How can these issues be dealt with?

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- **Loneliness -** It manifests in the distressing feeling due to divergences between one’s desired and actual social relationships.
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- Research shows that loneliness increases vascular resistance and diminishes immunity.
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- **Alcoholism -** Whether related to or unrelated to loneliness - a high risk factor for NCDs is daily consumption of alcohol.
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- Daily consumption of alcohol among the aged with NCDs rose more than twice over the period 2005.
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- **Networking -** Children play an important role in elderly support.
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- Women are increasingly taking up jobs that provide them with greater security in older age.
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- But this limits the capacity of women & families to provide care for the older people in their families due to work related pressures.
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What is the way forward?

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- Many of these chronic conditions such as hypertension can be prevented or delayed by engaging in healthy behaviours.
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- The World Report on Ageing and Health 2015 (WHO) speaks about the concept of graceful aging within communities.
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- This reinforces the case that solutions to the crisis of aging also outside health systems.
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- From a policy perspective, health systems have to be configured to deal with not one NCD but multiple NCDs to manage them better.
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- Above all, family ties and social networks need to be strengthened.
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Source: The Hindu

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