Focusing on Diseases Sidelined by COVID-19

What is the issue?

With increasing focus on COVID-19, non-communicable diseases and other health issues have been neglected which are adding a burden to the healthcare system

Why are non-communicable diseases burdensome?

- Nearly 71% of all deaths worldwide occur due to non-communicable diseases (NCDs) with cardiovascular diseases as the top cause.
- Premature loss of life due to NCDs in the age group of 30-69 years is very high among Indians.
- Among NCDs, persons with diabetes are at higher risk of severe clinical outcomes of COVID-19 such as mucormycosis

What disruptions have been caused due to the pandemic?

- Disruption of services such as primary healthcare system, Maternal healthcare services, Immunisation, Health surveillance, Screening and management of NCDs etc.
- Shortage of medicines, diagnostics and technologies
- Reassigning of staffs working in the area of NCDs
- Loneliness due to reduced physical interactions resulted in mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression.

What steps have been taken to address the issue?

- Setting up of National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular disease and Stroke (NPCDCS) to increase awareness on risk factors, to set up cardiac care units and to carry out screening at primary health care levels.

- Integration of NPCDCS with the National Health Mission (NHM) and AYUSH

- Use of applications such as mDiabetes for diabetes control, mCessation to help for quit tobacco, and no more tension as a support for mental stress management.

- India is the first country to adopt the National Action Plan in response to WHO Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs 2013-2020

  India's National Action Plan aims at reducing the number of global premature deaths from NCDs by 25% by 2025.

- **Sustainable Development Goals**,2015 aims to reduce premature deaths from NCDs by one third by 2030

What should be done?

- Tobacco cessation must be included in NCD services such as in their national COVID-19 preparedness and response plans

- Telemedicine facilities should be promoted

- Equal weightage has to be provided for NCDs by the policymakers

- NGOs can be utilised in campaigning, delivery of medical services, etc.

- ASHA workers can be incentivised to ramp up the screening of NCDs at grassroot level

- Physical activity and mental health has to be prioritised
- Primary health system must be strengthened

Source : The Hindu

