

## Prioritising Palliative Care

***Mains:** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector | Services relating to Health, Education, and Human Resources.*

### Why in the News?

On the occasion of National Doctors' Day (1st July, 2025), palliative care was given special attention.

### What is palliative care?

- **Palliative Care** - It is a form of specialised care addressing a person's physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs.
- **Focus** - Unlike curative treatment that is aimed at eradicating disease, palliative care focuses on alleviating pain, reducing suffering, and improving quality of life — for patients and their families.
- **Aspects** - Palliative care extends beyond end-of-life support and includes pain management, psychological support, and improved quality of life at any stage of a serious illness.
- **Interdisciplinary Approach** - Palliative care involves a team of healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses, social workers, and chaplains, who work together to address the various needs of the patient and their family.



### **What are the significances of palliative care?**

- **Rise in Communicable Diseases** - The demand for palliative care is increasing constantly due to the global rise in non-communicable diseases such as cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory conditions.
- **Reduces Pressure on Healthcare System** - India's health-care system is already strained and faces increasing pressure.
- This makes it essential to integrate palliative care to reduce unnecessary hospitalisations and ease the emotional and financial burden on families.

- **Protects Dignity** - Palliative care plays a crucial role in providing comfort and ensuring dignity to those navigating terminal conditions.

### Palliative Care Initiative in India

- **National Health Policy, 2017** - Inclusion of palliative care in the National Health Policy of 2017 in India marked a pivotal step in addressing the gap.
- **National Program for Palliative Care (NPPC)** - Launched in 2012, is a key step towards integrating palliative care into the broader healthcare system.
- **Educational Program** - The projects on pain and palliative care by the Indian Council of Medical Research and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences exemplify gradual progress in this area.
- **Neighbourhood Network in Palliative Care (NNPC) Model** - Pioneered in Kerala, it demonstrates the effectiveness of community-led initiatives, where volunteers are trained to provide support and care to those in need within their communities.

### What are the challenges in palliative care?

- **Accessibility Issue** - Access to palliative care remains uneven, especially in rural areas, and primarily among economically disadvantaged populations.
  - *Each year, approximately 7.2 million Indians need palliative care.*
- **Underfunded** - Inadequate budget allocation for much of the activities envisaged in the palliative care policy, namely, the creation of palliative care centres in district hospitals and in tertiary referral centres.
- **Underappreciated** - According to the World Health Organization (WHO), an estimated 40 million people globally require palliative care each year, with 78% of them living in low and middle-income countries.
- However, only 14% of those in need receive such care.
- In India, where an estimated seven million to 10 million people require palliative care annually, only 1%-2% have access to it.
- **Shortage of Trained Professionals** - While India's doctor-population ratio of 1:834, surpasses the WHO recommended norm of 1:1000, the availability of medical practitioners specialising in palliative care is disproportionately low.
- **Lack of Integration with Tertiary Sector** - While palliative care is included in the primary health sector, its integration into tertiary care remains incomplete.
- **Low Public Awareness** - Public awareness of palliative care remains limited, leading to misconceptions and late-stage access to these critical services.

### What can be done to strengthen palliative care in India?

- The gap between demand for and availability of palliative care underscores the urgency for systemic intervention and policy prioritisation.
- **Capacity Building** - Strengthening the capacity of doctors to deliver this care, particularly in underserved regions, is imperative.
- In order to equip medical professionals with the skills and the empathy required to address end-of-life care, integrating palliative care into the core MBBS curriculum is crucial.
- **Task Shifting** - Given the limited availability of palliative care specialists, task-shifting

(delegating responsibilities to trained allied health-care workers) emerges as a viable solution.

- **Empowering Existing Workforce** - India has a huge base of 34.33 lakh registered nursing personnel and 13 lakh allied health-care professionals.
- Empowering this workforce through targeted training can help bridge the gap, ensuring holistic care, particularly in rural areas and underserved regions.
- **Prudent Policy** - Policymakers must recognise the long-term benefits of investing in palliative care, from improving patient outcomes to reducing the overall burden on the health-care system.
- **Dedicated Funding** - Governments can allocate dedicated funding for palliative care programmes, ensuring that public and private health-care facilities are equipped with the necessary infrastructure.
- **Insurance Coverage** - Insurance schemes such as Ayushman Bharat should expand coverage to include palliative care, making these services more financially accessible to patients and families.
- **Inclusion of Third Sector** - Partnerships with non-governmental organisations and private institutions can also accelerate the expansion of these facilities.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns** - It can demystify palliative care and encourage early access to services.
- **The U.S. Model** - The United States has a well-established palliative care system that is driven by robust funding mechanisms, insurance coverage, and hospice care models.

## Reference

[The Hindu | Integrating compassion, prioritising palliative care](#)