



## Palliative Care

**For Prelims:** [Palliative care](#), [World Health Organization](#), [Noncommunicable diseases](#), [National Health Mission](#), [Telemedicine](#)

**For Mains:** Issues Related to Healthcare in India, Significance of Palliative Care.

**Source:** TH

### Why in News?

A recent study has shed light on the **overwhelming financial burden** faced by patients grappling with serious illnesses.

- As the cost of treating life-limiting illnesses pushes individuals into poverty, **palliative care** becomes **essential to address this critical issue** and advocate for holistic patient-centered care.

### What is Palliative Care?

- **About:**
  - **Palliative care** is a specialized approach to healthcare that focuses on **improving the quality of life** and providing comprehensive support to individuals facing **serious illnesses or life-limiting conditions**.
    - It is not about curing the disease but rather about addressing the **physical, emotional, social needs of the patient**.
    - It differs from other medical specialties as it **addresses not only physical health but also social and economic realities**.
- **Significance:**
  - According to the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), palliative care is explicitly recognized under the **human right to health**.
    - It recognizes that palliative care is part of the comprehensive services required for [noncommunicable diseases \(NCDs\)](#) through the **Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs 2013-2020**.
  - Early initiation of palliative care in advanced disease stages can **reduce healthcare expenditure by up to 25%**.
    - Also, palliative care **emphasizes vocational rehabilitation** and social reintegration, enabling patients and families to earn a living and maintain their dignity.

### Note

**WHO** estimates that 56.8 million people need palliative care each year, including 25.7 million in the last year of life. In India, it's estimated that **5.4 million people need palliative care each year**.

- Only about **14% of people who need palliative care receive it.**
  
- **Related Issues in India:**
  - **Inadequate Investment in Healthcare:** Inadequate investment in India's healthcare system, including the **insufficient fulfillment of basic infrastructure needs**, has resulted in a **backlog of palliative care services**, limiting their availability and accessibility for patients with life-limiting illnesses.
    - Also, with only **1.35% of the GDP** allocated to **government health services** (2019-20), patients bear most of the healthcare costs which leaves them at risk of **bankruptcy, decreased satisfaction with treatment**, delayed medical care, poor quality of life, and **lower survival rates**.
  - **Limited Awareness and Understanding:**
    - **Among Patients and Families:** Many individuals and their families are unaware of what palliative care entails and **may associate it with end-of-life care only**, leading to delayed or inadequate utilization.
      - Also, most insurance schemes in India do not cover palliative care, further limiting its accessibility.
    - **Among Healthcare Providers:** Even many healthcare professionals lack a clear understanding of palliative care, which result in **insufficient referrals or integration into treatment plans**.
  - **Heterogeneous Healthcare Infrastructure:** The healthcare infrastructure varies widely in India, with advanced healthcare facilities concentrated in urban areas and limited access to palliative care services in rural and remote regions.
    - However, even in urban areas, **as palliative care does not generate revenue but saves costs**, it is often **neglected in the increasingly privatized Indian healthcare system**.
  
- **Palliative Care Programme in India:**
  - While there is no dedicated budget for the **National Palliative Care Program in India**, it is included within the **'Mission Flexipool' under the [National Health Mission \(NHM\)](#)**.
  - Additionally, the **National Program for Prevention & Control of Non-Communicable Diseases (NP-NCD) launched in 2010** focuses on addressing the rising burden of non-communicable diseases by offering comprehensive healthcare services spanning **promotive, preventive, and curative care across all levels of healthcare**.

## Way Forward

- **Policy and Regulatory Framework:** There is a need to **develop and implement clear, uniform palliative care policies** and regulations at both the **national and state levels** to guide the integration of palliative care services into the healthcare system.
- **Public Awareness:** Launching comprehensive public awareness campaigns to **educate both patients and healthcare providers** about the benefits and scope of palliative care, dispelling myths and stigma associated with it.
  - Also, Integrating palliative care training into the **curriculum of [healthcare professionals](#)**, ensuring that **medical schools, nursing programs, and other training institutions** offer courses and practical experience in palliative care.
- **Funding and Resource Allocation:** Allocating specific and sufficient resources to the **National Program for Palliative Care** and ensuring that insurance schemes cover palliative care services.
- **Leveraging Technology:** Leveraging emerging technologies such as **[telemedicine](#), [mobile health apps](#), and [wearable devices](#)** to provide remote palliative care consultations and monitoring.