In India, as elsewhere, "good health adds life to years"

New Delhi, 3 April 2012: The World Health Organization and the WHO Country Office for India, in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, call for a greater attention to the ageing of India’s population, its implications for health policy and for the promotion of a society where the elderly can live full, enriching and productive lives.

In India, as all around the world, people are living longer. Undoubtedly, the population of India is ageing and will continue to age steadily in the next few decades. It is estimated that the population aged 60 years and above will grow from 77 million (7.4% of the total population) in 2001 up to 300 million (17%) by 2050.

The ageing of the population has major implications for the Indian health system and society as a whole. This needs to be further researched, understood and addressed by relevant and appropriate policies and actions.

"The challenge for India, as for all countries over the world, is not only to add further years to life but more importantly to add life to years and to ensure that the elderly can live full, enriching and productive lives. For this to be possible, good health is essential," said Dr. Nata Menabde, WHO Representative to India.

With the steady increase in life expectancy and the elderly population, the burden of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs, like heart disease and stroke, cancers, diabetes, mental health problems, vision and hearing impairment) will continue to grow, putting significant additional demands on health services.

"With trend towards nuclear family, care of the elderly population at the family level will become difficult. Long term care of old and very old will need additional inputs from the families and governments," said Dr. Samlee Plianbangchang, WHO Regional Director for South-East Asia.

In the years to come, there will be a need to further improve the access of the elderly population to preventive, promotive, curative and rehabilitative services. "The launch of the National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE) by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare is an important step in that direction," added Dr. Nata Menabde.

Appropriate and age-friendly health care services for the elderly will need to be stepped up. Measures at all ages of life, "from the womb to the tomb", need to be taken to prevent sufferings and the skyrocketing of health costs, said Dr. Samlee Plianbangchang. A balanced diet, refraining from smoking and maintaining a reasonable physical activity can make a major difference. Good health at all ages will add life to years!
Beyond that, respect and actions in many sectors and directions are needed to ensure the elderly stay in good health, inspire the society and bring their knowledge, experience and love to others of all ages.

To inform and sensitize all authorities and actors and to call for action in this domain, the WHO Country Office for India in partnership with the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India, is planning a series of consultations, workshops and activities involving stakeholders at the national, state and local level.

On the World Health Day 2012, 19 state level meetings as well as a national meeting are being organized. WHO is also supporting a one-day national meeting at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi on 7 April 2012. It will include a walkathon with elderly participants.

The key messages for highlighting the issue of the elderly include:

- Older people are a valuable resource for their societies and should feel valued.
- Good health throughout life helps us make the most of the positive aspects of aging.
- Societies, which take care of their older populations and support their active participation in daily life, will be better prepared to cope with the changing world.

On the World Health Day 2012, the WHO Country Office for India calls for greater attention and action towards promoting a society where the elderly live full, enriching and productive lives.

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