



10 States yet to implement Mental Health Act

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

More than two years after the enactment of the Mental Health Act, 2017, around 10 States are yet to set up authorities for the proper implementation of the rules under the new legislation. Ten per cent of India's population suffers from mental illnesses, and 90 per cent of them remain untreated.

"Only 19 States have implemented the Mental Healthcare Act so far," said Sanjeeva Kumar, Special Secretary Health Ministry.

He said 10.6 per cent adult population in the country suffers from mental health issues. This is a huge number requiring holistic concept of safety nets, legal frameworks and medical care facilities.

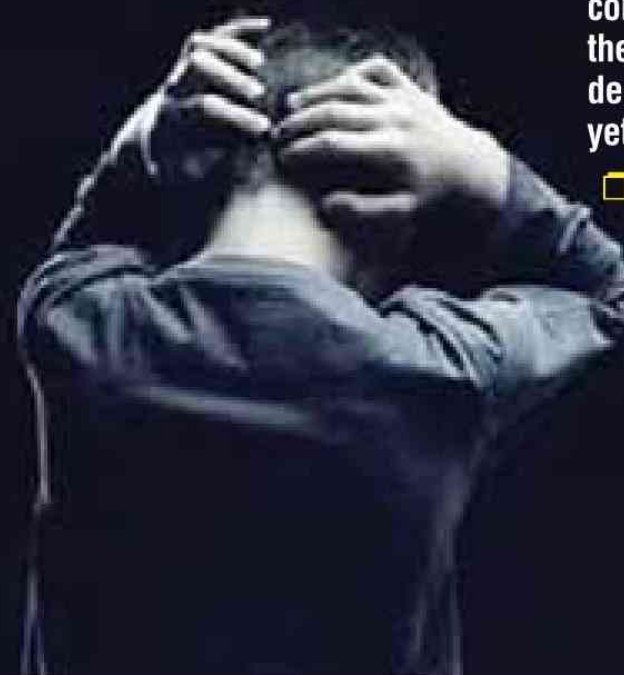
Kumar was speaking at a recent national level review meeting on mental health. The meet was organised by National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

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ogists, mental health nurses and psychiatric social workers.

The Act mandates the States to have a functional authority within nine months of the law coming into force, but most of the States have missed the deadline. The States are also yet to draft the rules of the Act.

"There is a lack of understanding among States about how to make rules. They need a bit of legal guidance and handholding," Preeti Sudan, Health Secretary said.

She said with the lack of new rules, the rules of the old Mental Health Act (1987) are still being followed.

Earlier, inaugurating the meeting, NHRC Chairperson, Justice HL Dattu said that the efforts to improve the mental health care in the country have been made but a huge gap still remains between the requirements and availability of facilities in the sector.

Flagging it as a matter of serious concern for the Commission, he said that con-

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sistent with its policy to monitor the mental health sector, it felt necessary to evaluate the ground realities post implementation of Mental Healthcare Act, 2017.

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According to a study conducted by the National Institute

of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) in 2016, across 12 States, the prevalence of depression for both current and lifetime is 2.7 per cent and 5.2 per cent, respectively. Approximately 1 in 40 and 1 in 20 people are suffering from past and current episodes of depression all over the country. This survey has shown that the lifetime prevalence of mental disorder is 13.7 per cent as a whole, which would mean at least 150 million Indians are in need of urgent intervention.

However, there is a long way to go to meet the needs. The Health Ministry official highlighted that the States are not using funds dispersed for the implementation of the Act, which has forced the Health Ministry to switch up systems for the transfer of the remaining amount. The Ministry has now decided to reimburse the States instead of paying instalments.

"Despite the system of money dispersal having changed, no States have applied for reimbursements," said Lav Agarwal, joint secretary, Health Ministry. He added if the Centre releases money and the States don't utilise it, then the manpower cannot be increased.

Aarogyasri issue taken to National Human Rights Commission notice

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HIGHLIGHTS

A social activist has approached National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) over Telangana Aarogyasri Network Hospitals Association's (TANHA) non-compliance with Aarogyasri norms, citing non-payment of dues by the State government.

Hyderabad: A social activist has approached National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) over Telangana Aarogyasri Network Hospitals Association's (TANHA) non-compliance with Aarogyasri norms, citing non-payment of dues by the State government.

Dr Lubna Sarwath, a social activist and spokesperson, Socialist Party (India), sought intervention from the Secretary-General and Chief Executive Officer of National Human Rights Commission, New Delhi, over the issue. She alleged that poor patients with health ailments were being turned back by corporate hospitals in the city, in spite of being eligible for treatment under the Aarogyasri Health Scheme.

"Owing to the dispute over dues of around 800-1500 crores to be paid to TANHA by Government of Telangana, the TANHA stopped giving Aarogyasri health services to eligible poor patients in spite of the MoU that they signed," she noted.