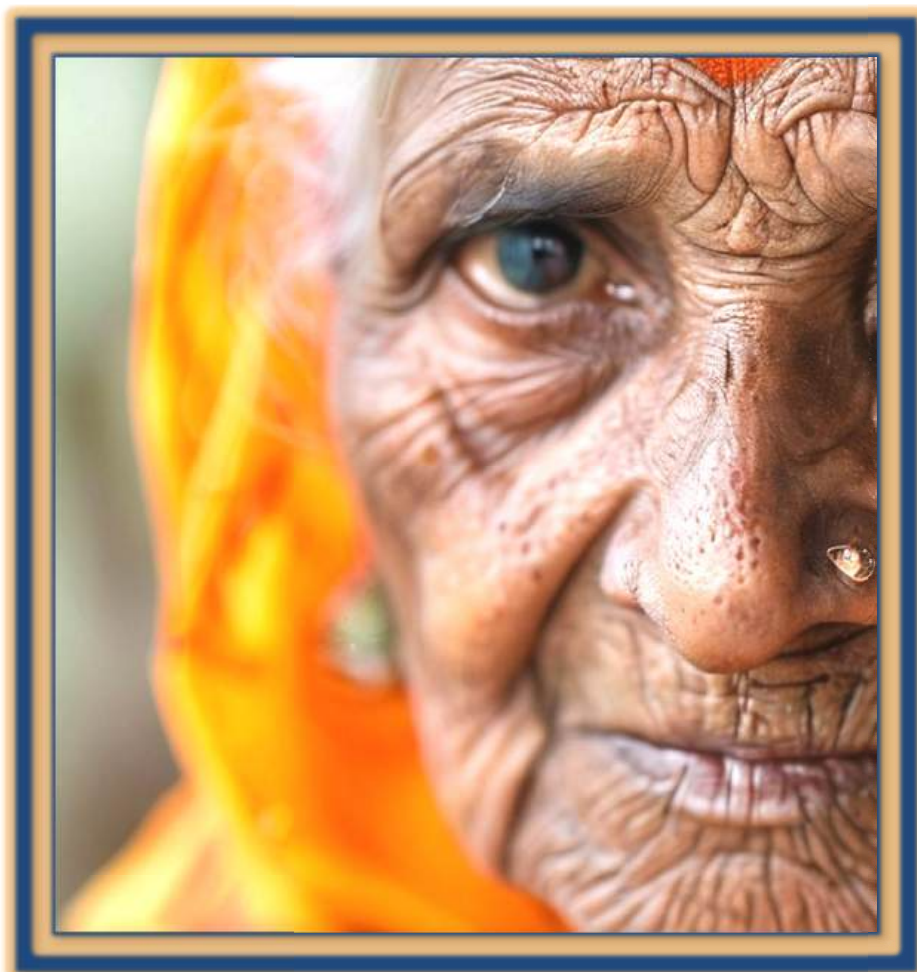# National Human Rights Commission

Proceedings of the
National Conference on Rights of Older Persons

(18th October 2024, Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi)

A National Conference on Rights of Older Persons, with the theme –**Assessing the Structural Framework, Legal Safeguards, Social Security Rights and Institutional Protection of India's Elderly** was organized by The National Human Rights Commission at Vigyan Bhavan on October 18, 2024.

Shri Devendra Kumar Nim, Joint Secretary, NHRC delivered the welcome address by giving an overview of the conference and highlighting the efforts taken by the Commission for the welfare of the elderly. He spoke about the initiatives undertaken by the Government to improve the quality of life and health of the elderly. He emphasized the need for targeted interventions considering the expected increase in the number of elderly persons in India from 150 million in 2024 to 300 million in 2050. He hoped that the conference would pave the way for increased cooperation between government and non-government organizations with an objective to bridge the gaps between policy framework and implementation. Additionally, he highlighted the benefits of community participation and stakeholder engagement in identifying new challenges to the welfare of the elderly.

Shri Bharat Lal, Secretary General, NHRC delivered the opening remarks and set the agenda for the conference. He drew attention to the importance of socio-economic and cultural rights, which are at the heart of governance. They are essential for every individual to realize their full potential and contribute effectively to the development of the nation. Marginalized groups, including the elderly, require handholding to ensure that they are not left behind. He reiterated the important role played by the NHRC in highlighting the challenges faced by vulnerable communities, especially taking note of issues of mental health, of widows and individuals involved in beggary.

The combination of rapid urbanization, globalization, and the nuclear family structure has brought to the fore new challenges faced by the elderly. Drawing attention to the various challenges faced by the elderly, including financial, health, social, he emphasized on the

importance of creating an enabling environment which will provide an impetus to the elderly to share their wisdom and experiences for the welfare of the society.

Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani, Hon'ble Acting Chairperson, NHRC delivered the keynote address, where she spoke about the importance of the topic in today's time. It is our moral duty to reflect on the contributions of those who have paved the way for us and treat them with respect and compassion. Financial literacy and healthcare issues plague our elderly, who are often mistreated by their kin. She highlighted 6 areas that require attention- ensuring access to healthcare, preventive care and rehabilitation; recognizing the mental health needs of the elderly; ensuring financial literacy and access to social security/ welfare schemes, providing affordable housing, including home-based care; strengthening anti-discriminatory laws; and promoting programmes for reintegration into society. She said that there are laws and several government schemes to address the needs of older adults. However, their effective implementation remains a key challenge.

Technical Session – I: Addressing the Issue of Ageing of the Aged

Shri Amit Yadav, Secretary, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment chaired the session. The panellist speakers included- Dr. OP Sharma, Geriatrics Care Specialist, Apollo Hospitals**,** Dr. TV Shekhar, Professor, Department of Family & Generations, IIPS**,** Ms. Anupama Dutta, Head, Policy Research and Advocacy, HelpAge India**,** Ms. Chhaya Sharma, Special Commissioner of Police, Training and SPUWAC, Delhi, Dr. Sudha Goel, Senior Consultant, NITI Aayog, Health and Family Welfare Vertical and Dr. Mala Kapur Shankardass, Sociologist and Gerontologist- Gender and Aging, Elder Abuse and Social Policies.

The session highlighted several key issues, including inadequate healthcare, social isolation, economic insecurity, and the digital divide. Participants discussed the need for improved access to healthcare, especially in rural areas, as well as the importance of addressing mental health and cognitive decline. They also emphasized the need for community-based support systems to combat social isolation and elder abuse.

The speakers addressed economic security concerns, such as inadequate social security and pension schemes, and the difficulties faced by the elderly in accessing financial services. The digital divide was another major concern, with many elderly individuals struggling to adapt to technology and digital services. To address these issues, participants proposed various solutions, including policy reforms, increased healthcare access, social support programs, digital inclusion initiatives, and caregiver support systems.

Technical Session – II: The Gendered Face of Ageing

Ms. Andrea. M. Wojnar, Resident Country Representative, UNFPA India chaired the session.

The panelist speakers included- Ms. Abha Choudhary, Founder, Anugraha, Prof. Aasha Kapur Mehta, Chairperson, Centre for Gender Studies Institute for Human Development, New Delhi, Mrs. Damyanti V. Tambay, Vice President, War Widows Association, Dr. Laxmi Gautam, Professor at the Institute of Oriental Philosophy, Vrindavan, and Founder of the Kanak Dhara Foundation, Vrindavan and Ms. Sonam Mishra, Vice President of Sulabh International.

The session highlighted the gendered aspect of ageing, with women facing unique challenges such as isolation, poverty, and dependency. Panelists discussed the need for policies that address the specific needs of older women, particularly those from marginalized groups.

The speakers also focused on the plight of widows. The lack of social support, economic security, and dignified living conditions were highlighted. Participants called for stronger social safety nets, increased pensions, and better access to healthcare for older women. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of community-based support systems, skill development programs, and intergenerational solidarity to improve the quality of life for the elderly.

Technical Session – III: Evaluating the Healthcare Scenario: Impact on Healthy Life, Productivity & Social Security

Dr Vinod K Paul, Member, NITI Aayog chaired the session. The panellist speakers included- Dr GP Bhagat, Founder and General Secretary, SHEOWS Foundation**,** Mr. Himanshu Jain,

Founder & CEO, Khyaal Startup, Mumbai, Maharashtra**,** Shri Rajasekaran Manivaram, Co-Founder, Dr V S Natarajan Geriatric Foundation, Chennai, Dr Prasun Chatterjee, Professor, Department of Geriatric Medicine, AIIMS, New Delhi and Dr Sanjay Wadhwa, Professor and Head**,** Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, AIIMS, New Delhi.

The session highlighted the need for comprehensive healthcare and social support systems to address the specific needs of the aging population. Key points discussed included government initiatives to include the elderly in healthcare schemes, community-based efforts to provide support and services, the importance of physical activity, healthy eating, and early intervention for age-related diseases, the need for accessible and affordable healthcare, and the potential of technology to improve access to care.

Participants suggested developing a national program dedicated to elderly healthcare, focusing on preventive measures, early intervention, a primary healthcare model and community-based care. Overall, the speakers underscored the importance of a multi-faceted approach involving government, civil society, and the private sector to ensure the well-being and dignity of the aging population.

Outcomes of the Conference

The following actionable points and recommendations emanated from the discussions and presentations of **Agenda 1**.

1.1 Healthcare

   i.) Universal Health Coverage: Ensuring that all elderly individuals have access to affordable, quality healthcare services, regardless of their income or social status.

   ii.) Geriatric Care Specialists: Increasing the number of doctors specializing in geriatric care who can provide tailored medical attention to the specific needs of older adults.

   iii.) Chronic Disease Management: Developing comprehensive programs that involve providing regular check-ups, medication management, and lifestyle counselling to help older adults manage chronic conditions effectively.

iv.) Mental Health Services: Addressing mental health issues like depression and anxiety is crucial for the overall well-being of older adults. Providing access to mental health professionals can help improve their quality of life.

v.) Tele-health Services: Using technology to provide remote healthcare services can be particularly beneficial for older adults with mobility limitations or those living in rural areas.

1.2 Social Security

i.) Pension Reforms: Strengthening pension systems and ensuring its effective implementation can ensure that older adults have a reliable source of income during their retirement years.

ii.) Social Security Benefits: Expanding social security benefits can provide additional financial support for essential needs like housing, healthcare, and long-term care.

iii.) Financial Literacy Programs: Educating older adults about financial planning, budgeting, and investment strategies can help them make informed decisions about their finances.

1.3 Elder Abuse Prevention

i.) Mandatory Reporting and Implementation of Laws: Implementing laws that require healthcare professionals, social workers, and other designated individuals to report suspected cases of elder abuse can help identify and address these issues promptly.

ii.) Public Awareness Campaigns: Raising public awareness about elder abuse can help prevent it by educating people about the signs of abuse and encouraging them to report it.

iii.) Training for Healthcare Professionals: Training healthcare professionals to recognize the signs of elder abuse can help identify victims and intervene early as the first point of contact.

iv.) Support Services for Victims: Providing support services like counselling, legal aid, and safe housing can help victims of elder abuse recover and rebuild their lives.

1.4 Digital Literacy and Inclusion

i.) Digital Literacy Training: Offering free or low-cost training programs can help older adults acquire the skills needed to use computers, smart phones, and the internet.

ii.) User-Friendly Technology: Designing technology and interface that is easy to use and understand can help older adults overcome barriers to digital access.

iii.) Accessible Online Services: Making government and private sector services accessible online and user-friendly can help older adults access essential services conveniently.

1.5 Care-giving Support Mechanisms

i.) Caregiver Support Services: Providing respite/rehabilitative care, counselling, and financial assistance can help family caregivers manage the physical and emotional demands of caregiving.

ii.) **Professional Caregiver Training:** Training professional caregivers can ensure that they are equipped with the skills and knowledge to provide high-quality and multi-dimensional care.

iii.) **Community-Based Care:** Promoting community-based care models can provide a variety of services, such as adult day care and home health care, to support older adults and their families and combat social isolation.

1.6 Policy and Planning Initiatives

i.) **Age-Friendly Cities and Communities:** Creating age-friendly environments can improve the quality of life for older adults by making public spaces and modes of public transportation accessible, safe, and inclusive.

ii.) **Long-Term Care Planning:** Developing long-term care plans can help individuals and families plan for future care needs and make informed decisions about available care options and finances thereof.

iii.) **Inter-generational Programs:** Encouraging inter-generational programs can foster social connections between older adults and younger generations, reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness and locally emulate the 'buddy-programs' in practice in some countries.

iv.) **Data Collection and Analysis:** Collecting and analysing data on the various socio-economic and cultural aspects of the aging population can help policymakers identify trends, allocate resources effectively, and develop evidence-based policies.

The following actionable points and recommendations emanated from the discussions and presentations of **Agenda 2**.

2.1 Need to develop Gender-Sensitive Policies

i.) Create specific policies that target the unique challenges faced by older women, especially widows.

ii.) These policies should address issues like healthcare access, financial security, housing and social isolation.

iii.) Focus on the needs of older women in rural areas, who often face greater challenges due to limited access to resources and services.

iv.) Encourage private sector involvement in initiatives that support older women, such as corporate social responsibility programs.

v.) Regularly monitor and evaluate the impact of policies and programs on older women to ensure their relevance and make necessary adjustments.

2.2 Increase Social Security Benefits

i.) Enhance social security programs to provide adequate financial support for older women, especially widows and those living in poverty.

ii.) This could involve increasing pension amounts, expanding coverage, and streamlining access to benefits.

2.3 Improve Healthcare Access

i.) Ensure that healthcare facilities are accessible and affordable for older women, particularly in rural areas.

ii.) Provide geriatric care services, including regular health check-ups, medication assistance, and chronic disease management.

iii.) Implement health insurance schemes that cover the specific needs of older women.

2.4 Promote Inter-generational Programs

i.) Organize programs that bring together people of different ages to foster understanding, respect, and mutual support.

ii.) Inter-generational activities can help reduce social isolation and loneliness among older women.

iii.) These programs can be implemented in schools, community centres, widow shelters and retirement homes.

2.5 Strengthen Community Organizations

i.) Support local organizations that provide services to older women, such as community centres, senior citizen clubs, and NGOs.

ii.) These organizations can offer a range of services, including counselling, legal aid, vocational training and recreational activities.

2.6 Encourage Inter-generational Activities

i.) Organize community events and activities that involve people of all ages.

ii.) These activities can include cultural festivals, sports events, and volunteer programs.

iii.) Such initiatives can strengthen social bonds and promote inter-generational respect.

2.7 Raise Awareness and Build Capacity

i.) Conduct awareness campaigns to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about aging.

ii.) Educate the public about the contributions of older women to society and the challenges they face.

iii.) Promote positive aging and encourage respect for older people, especially women.

2.8 Provide Education and Skill Development

i.) Offer educational and vocational training programs to help older women acquire new skills and knowledge.

ii.) These programs can empower older women to become self-reliant and contribute to the economy.

2.9 Promote Financial Literacy

i.) Provide financial literacy training to help older women manage their finances effectively.

ii.) This can include budgeting, saving, and investment strategies.

iii.) Financial literacy can help older women make informed decisions about their financial future and independence.

2.10 Encourage Healthy and Active Aging

i.) Promote healthy lifestyle habits, such as regular exercise, a balanced diet, and stress management.

ii.) Encourage older women to participate in physical activity and social activities to improve their physical and mental health.

iii.) Provide access to healthcare services to prevent and manage chronic and co-morbid diseases.

The following actionable points and recommendations emanated from the discussions and presentations of **Agenda 3**.

3.1 Government Initiatives

i.) Strengthen Implementation of AYUSH: The government should ensure that the benefits of the AYUSH scheme reach the intended beneficiaries, especially the elderly. This can be achieved through effective monitoring, streamlined procedures, and adequate resource allocation.

ii.) Develop a National Elderly Care Program and Focus on Primary Care: A comprehensive national program can provide a framework for addressing the diverse needs of the elderly, including healthcare, social services, and financial security. A primary care model must be developed in collaboration with concerned ministries and domain experts for targeted focus on the demands of the elderly which can be accessible near their homes.

iii.) Promote Active Aging: By encouraging physical activity, social engagement, and cognitive stimulation, the government can help the elderly maintain their independence and quality of life.

iv.) Invest in Infrastructure: Investing in rehabilitation centres and accessible facilities can improve the quality of care for the elderly, particularly those with mobility impairments.

3.2 Community-Based Initiatives

i.) Foster Community Engagement: Community-based organizations can play a vital role in providing support, companionship, and essential services to the elderly.

ii.) Promote Volunteerism: Encouraging volunteerism can help address the growing needs of the elderly, especially in rural areas where access to formal care services may be limited.

iii.) Create Hyper local Communities: By creating localized support systems, communities can better cater to the specific needs of their elderly residents which may target health and social inclusion aspects.

3.3 Technological Interventions

i.) Leverage Technology: Technology can be used to provide remote monitoring, telemedicine consultations and social connectivity for the elderly.

ii.) Promote Digital Literacy: By educating the elderly about technology, they can access information, services, and social connections more easily.

iii.) Develop User-Friendly Apps: User-friendly apps can help the elderly manage their health, finances, and social interactions.

3.4 Awareness and Education

i.) Raise Awareness: Public awareness campaigns can help dispel myths and stereotypes about aging, promote positive attitudes towards the elderly, and encourage intergenerational relationships.

ii.) Promote Healthy Aging: Educating the public about healthy lifestyle practices can help the elderly maintain their physical and mental health and lessen the burden of the demographic pyramid.

iii.) Train Healthcare Professionals: Training healthcare professionals in geriatric care can improve the quality of care provided to the elderly.

3.5 Policy Reforms

i.) Strengthen Social Security Net: Adequate pensions and healthcare benefits can help ensure the financial security and well-being of the elderly.

ii.) Address the issue of Identification: Implementing efficient identification systems can help abandoned elderly individuals access government benefits and services.

iii.) Encourage CSR in Elderly Care: By incentivizing corporate social responsibility, businesses can contribute to the development of elderly care programs and facilities.

I.   **NHRC Officials**

1. Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani, Hon'ble Acting Chairperson, NHRC

2. Shri Bharat Lal, Secretary General, NHRC

3. Shri Ajay Bhatnagar, Director General (Investigation), NHRC

4. Shri Joginder Singh, Registrar (Law), NHRC

5. Smt. Anita Sinha, Joint Secretary, NHRC

6. Shri Devendra Kumar Nim, Joint Secretary, NHRC

7. Dr Kanaklata Yadav, Consultant (Research), NHRC

8. Ms. Ahana Ray, Junior Research Consultant, NHRC

9. Officials and staff of NHRC

II.   **Session Chairs**

1. Shri Amit Yadav, Secretary, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment

2. Ms. Andrea M. Wojnar, Resident Country Representative, UNFPA

3. Dr. Vinod K Paul, Member, NITI Aayog

III. **Panelists**

1. Dr. OP Sharma, Geriatrics Care Specialist, Apollo Hospitals

2. Dr. TV Shekhar, Professor, Department of Family & Generations, IIPS

3. Ms. Anupama Dutta, Head, Policy Research and Advocacy, HelpAge India

4. Ms. Chhaya Sharma, Special Commissioner of Police, Training and SPUWAC, Delhi

5. Dr. Sudha Goel, Senior Consultant, NITI Aayog, Health & Family Welfare Vertical

6. Dr. Mala Kapur Shankardass, Sociologist and Gerontologist- Gender and Aging, Elder Abuse and Social Policies

7. Ms. Abha Choudhary, Founder, Anugraha

8. Prof. Aasha Kapur Mehta, Chairperson, Centre for Gender Studies Institute for Human Development, New Delhi

9. Mrs. Damyanti V. Tambay, Vice President, War Widows Association

10. Dr. Laxmi Gautam, Professor at the Institute of Oriental Philosophy, Vrindavan, and Founder of the Kanak Dhara Foundation, Vrindavan

11. Ms. Sonam Mishra, Vice President of Sulabh International

12. Dr GP Bhagat, Founder and General Secretary, SHEOWS Foundation

13. Mr. Himanshu Jain, Founder & CEO, Khyaal Startup, Mumbai

14. Shri Rajasekaran Manivaram, Co-Founder, Dr V S Natarajan Geriatric Foundation, Chennai

15. Dr Prasun Chatterjee, Professor, Department of Geriatric Medicine, AIIMS, New Delhi

16. Dr Sanjay Wadhwa, Professor and Head, Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, AIIMS, New Delhi

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" सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः
सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः।
सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु
मा कश्चित् दुःखभाग् भवेत् । "

"May all be Prosperous and Happy,

May all be Free from Illness,

May all See what is Auspicious,

May no one Suffer"

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