



National AIDS Control Organisation
India's Voice against AIDS
Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India
www.naco.gov.in

NACO NEWS



July Edition

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MESSAGE FROM THE DESK OF PATRON

Dear Readers,

I welcome everyone to the July edition of NACO News!



The month of July, 2021, has certainly been an extremely engaging month for the programme. NACO conducted a National Level Orientation on Roles and Functioning of Ombudsman designated/appointed by States as per HIV/AIDS (P&C) Act, 2017. I am sure that the consultation has been instrumental in building capacity of Ombudsman at state level.

We also had the National Stakeholder Consultation to facilitate community discussion and deliberation on Community Systems Strengthening (CSS). Community Systems Strengthening (CSS) has been in consideration over the last few years and with commitments to ending AIDS by 2030, a much more considered and stronger attention to community engagement, involvement and ownership at all levels of the program has been envisioned.

India's AIDS Control Programme has been a learning platform for other countries. This gives us opportunity to cross-learn and to share new thoughts about innovative models going forward. NACO recently had a dialogue with Indonesia and Thailand on optimizing distribution of prevention-tools through different networks for reaching priority populations and to develop action plans, the aim was to accelerate and optimize the distribution by increasing the availability of these prevention-tool & accessibility among priority populations. I hope India's experiences were helpful for both the countries.

With these words, I urge you all to follow the COVID-19 protocol and help us fighting against this disease.

With best wishes,



Alok Saxena
Additional Secretary & Director General (NACO)
Ministry of Health & Family Welfare,
Government of India

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR



Dear Readers,

We are happy to present the July edition of NACO News!

It brings me immense pleasure to share with you all that NACO along with all State AIDS Control Societies is gearing up for India@75. NACO will launch Awareness Campaigns on HIV & AIDS, Tuberculosis and Blood Donation, in phased manner. Through these awareness campaigns, activities will be organised by schools, Red Ribbon Clubs in colleges and other settings. This Campaign will focus upon disseminating information regarding HIV/TB prevention and services, developing an understanding about the infection to reduce stigma & discrimination against People Living with HIV/AIDS and TB and encouraging blood donation.

I would like to appreciate the efforts of Bihar SACS for establishing 'Sehat Kendra' in 28 colleges across the state. These Sehat Kendra will act as a safe space for the college students to discuss, deliberate and create wide spread awareness on a range of issues pertaining to their health needs and entitlements. It is heartening to share that through this initiative BSACS has brought together State Health Society Bihar (SHSB) and Population Foundation of India (PFI). This is exactly what we envision while speaking of multi-sectoral collaborations. I urge all of you to explore more such options so that maximum output can be attained with ease even when the infrastructure is limited.

Another good news has come from the state of Sikkim where Joint Working Group Meeting on Youth has recently been conducted in order to have better synergy among the line department, NGO and SACS while implementing youth centric programmes, related specifically to HIV/AIDS, Substance Abuse, Tuberculosis and Adolescent Education Programme.

SACS always come up with experimental approaches to reach out to tier 2 and tier 3 cities in states. This also gives us the motivation to explore new interventions. One such initiative in the line has come from the state of Tamil Nadu where TNSACS in association with Department of Postal Services. A mascot named 'Punch Patti' was coined over one lakh 'Meghdoot postcards' that presents awareness messages on National Toll Free Help line of HIV/AIDS: 1097. These postcards were distributed free of cost to promote the various services available for people infected with and affected by HIV and AIDS.

With these words, now it's time to bid adieu to all my colleagues, fellow officers and subordinates at national and state level as my services and long association with AIDS Control Programme comes to an end with my retirement on 31st August, 2021. I am pleased to offer my voluntary services for any activity related to Public Health after my retirement.

Hope you all keep safe and healthy during these times.

Stay connected, stay exploring.

**Dr. Naresh Goel,
DDG (IEC & MS), NACO
Ministry of Health & Family Welfare,
Government of India**

NATIONAL LEVEL ORIENTATION OF OMBUDSMAN

Taking cognizance of the urgent need of the State AIDS Control Societies, NACO conducted the first National Level Orientation on Roles and Functioning of Ombudsman under the chairpersonship of Sh. Alok Saxena, AS&DG, NACO on 9th July, 2021. A total of 31 Ombudsman from 16 States i.e. Chhattisgarh, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Haryana, Goa, Sikkim, West Bengal, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu,

Gujarat, Odisha and UT of Andaman and Nicobar Islands joined the orientation.

The objective of the orientation was to acquaint the Ombudsman with the duty imposed on them under the HIV and AIDS (P & C) Act, 2017; for them to have a clear understanding on the legal rights of PLHIV and identify any violation which is prohibited under the Act.

BACKGROUND

The HIV and AIDS (Prevention and Control) Act, 2017 provides for the appointment of Ombudsman by respective State Governments to inquire into the violations of the provisions of the Act (Section 3 and providing healthcare services). Sections 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28 under Chapter X and Section 38 of the HIV and AIDS Act, 2017 deal with the authority of the Ombudsman, detailing the powers of the Ombudsman, the procedure of complaint and the orders of the Ombudsman.

HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ JVR Prasada Rao, Special Advisor, WHO SEARO addressed the States by putting forth the importance of supplementing the central legislation by formulating Rules by respective State Governments and notification of Guidelines by Central Government.
- ▶ Shri Alok Saxena, AS&DG, NACO, gave an outline on the legislative passage of the HIV and AIDS Act, 2017. He spoke on the prevalence of stigma and discrimination and the need for a robust grievance redressal mechanism.
- ▶ Dr. Rajesh Rana, National Consultant (IEC&MS), gave a detailed presentation on the major provisions under the HIV and AIDS Act, 2017, covering important provisions dealing with discrimination in different settings, informed consent, right to non-disclosure of HIV status, data confidentiality, right to residence, guardianship of older sibling and protection of identity in legal proceedings to name a few.
- ▶ Garima Sharma, APD, GFATM-NACO Project, SHARE INDIA gave a presentation on the service conditions of Ombudsman, drawing mainly from the state rules. She touched upon important aspects in the functioning of an Ombudsman, from the manner of inquiring into complaints, the requirement of maintaining records and the manner of making complaints etc.
- ▶ The presentation was concluded with a case study discussing the practical examples of complaints that the Ombudsman would receive. Towards the end of presentation, the house was open for questions and queries that were duly addressed. NACO has further urged the States to prioritize setting up of website of the Ombudsman. A second round of Orientation of Ombudsman will be conducted as and when more States appoint/designate Ombudsman.



SENSITIZATION OF MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS ON TRANSGENDER HEALTH: NACO'S ENGAGEMENT IN 'QUERENCIA'

Sensitizing the medical professionals is an important step towards addressing the health issues faced by transgender (TG) persons in India. Taking cognizance of the health needs of TG persons in India, NACO has been collaborating with Indian and Global professional organizations namely World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH), and Association for Transgender Health (ATHI) to name a few. In continuation to this effort, Dr. Shobini Rajan, DDG, NACO, became a part of a webinar series as a speaker on transgender health titled 'Demystifying Gender: Fostering gender-friendly healthcare' on 24th of July, 2021. The webinar was organized by 'Querencia', group of

medical students of Lady Harding Medical College (LHMC), and the WHO Collaborating Center for Adolescent Health of LHMC with the support from WPATH and the IAP (Indian Academy of Pediatrics). The webinar saw participation from eminent speakers of National and International repute, who delivered speech different aspects of transgender health care in India and at the global level.

Dr. Shobini Rajan, DDG, NACO, during her session highlighted the role of NACO in addressing the healthcare needs of TG persons, related to HIV/AIDS, social security as well as on the integrated approach to provide holistic healthcare services to

the transgender community. She apprised on NACO's engagement with National Medical Council for adapting the medical curriculum and for sensitization of medical students on provision of gender sensitive medical care to the transgender persons in India.

The webinar was attended by more than 300 participants comprising of medical students, teaching faculty of medical colleges, healthcare providers (medical, nursing and para-medical), social workers and students of social sciences and community members. The webinar was live streamed on the NACO YouTube channel permitting both National and International viewers to participate and interact with the speakers. The speakers and the sessions in this webinar led to the generation of

immense interest among the participants as well as on social media.



COMMUNITY SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING: A PARADIGM SHIFT IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

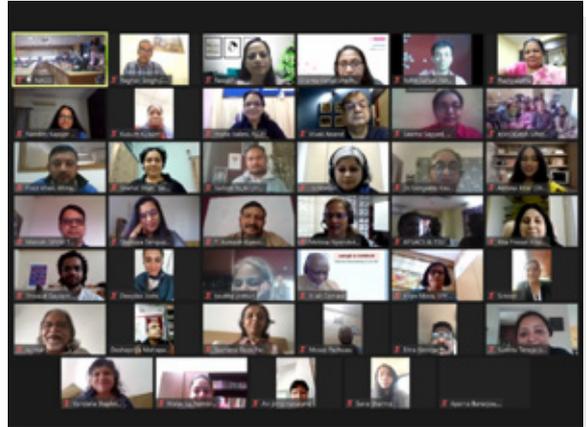
Since the inception of National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) under the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), community has been at the centre of the HIV/AIDS response in India. The strategies adopted by NACO for prevention, treatment and care have predominantly worked because the National Program has kept the centrality of its response with key populations as well as PLHIV, such that the program is in constant consultation and conversation with them in advancing the response.

Community Systems Strengthening (CSS) has been in consideration over the last few years and with commitments to ending AIDS by 2030, a stronger attention to community engagement, involvement and ownership at all levels of the program has been envisioned. Against this back drop, NACO, in collaboration with UNAIDS, organised a National Stakeholder Consultation to facilitate community discussion and deliberation on CSS to provide inputs into the development of a National CSS

framework as well as processes and tools critical to undertake a CLM pilot on February 2021. NACO had invited key stakeholders including development partners and community representatives for the consultation to ensure that CSS implementation and CLM roll out has the community at the centre maintaining a strong partnership between the community (KPs and PLHIV) with District, State and National actors.

As per the recommendations emanated from the National Consultation, NACO invited UNAIDS to set up a National Working Group comprising of members from communities, including youth representation. The objective of the working group is to guide and oversee the implementation of CSS in India as well as recommend NACO on implementing Framework, Standard Operating Procedures, to adopt as national guidelines as well as monitor and provide inputs on the implementation CSS and Community Led Monitoring (CLM).

As one of the essential components of CSS, Community Led Monitoring (CLM) provides a first-hand perspective on the implementation of quality services and minimum policies and standards. NACO is further exploring institutionalizing CLM as a viable mechanism for strategic engagement of HRG and PLHIV at grassroots level and service delivery points. The primary focus has been towards achieving outcomes in both the domains of prevention and treatment, with an emphasis on KP and prevention response; as well as people living with HIV and retention on treatment programs.



TRANSITION OF CONDOM PROMOTION OVER THE YEARS: SHARING INDIA'S EXPERIENCE

NACO was invited for a dialogue with Indonesia and Thailand on optimizing condom distribution networks for reaching priority populations and locations, which was held virtually on 7th July, 2021. The objective of the meeting was to distill the practical experience and lessons learned from other condom programs in the region, to share new thoughts about innovative models and to develop action plans for accelerating and optimizing condom distribution by increasing its availability & accessibility among priority populations. The target audiences for this dialogue were the National Managers and representatives from the Department of Disease Control/ Ministry of Public Health, the NHSO, USAID/PEPFAR, FHI-360, PRs of the Global Fund, Community-Based Organizations, NGOs and UNAID team.

Dr. Bhawani Singh, Deputy Director-TI, NACO, represented NACO in the meeting and highlighted the evolution of condom programme from NACP I to NACP IV and beyond. He talked about condom promotion approach, availability and demand generation under NACP, free condom supply channel, process initiatives (demand & supply) and challenges, social marketing, distribution channel

CSMP, implementation approach, data validation mechanism of NACO CSMP, monitoring & evaluation, communication campaign evolution, communication channels, mass media campaign and the programme impact- quality assurance & evaluation, behavioral survey etc.



UNAIDS Country Director, Thailand commended India's commitment towards ensuring access to free condoms for priority populations as showcased in this regional meeting. He further appreciated the sharing of on-ground and practical experiences of NACO and expressed the desire to continue this collaboration in future.

NATIONAL AIDS CONTROL AFTER ORGANIZATION GEARING UP FOR NEW INDIA@75

As our country celebrates the 75th anniversary of India's independence, the Government of India looks forward to building on the concept of New India @ 75, which aims to improve system's efficiency, transparency and accountability. To contribute to the development of New India @ 75, the National AIDS Organization (NACO) will launch progressive awareness campaigns. Through these awareness campaigns, a number of activities will be organized by schools and Red Ribbon Clubs constituted within the colleges. These campaigns will be based on awareness raising on HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis as well as on the promotion of blood donation.

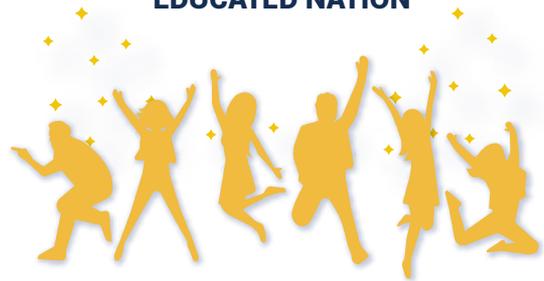
These campaigns aim to achieve the following program objectives:

- ▶ Dissemination of information on HIV/TB related prevention and services;
- ▶ Improve understanding of infection to reduce stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis;
- ▶ Encourage blood donation within youth

With 25 public schools and universities participating in each state, NACO expects to reach a minimum of 7.5 million students nationwide through these campaigns. Committees at the national, state, and regional levels are formed to design and execute these campaigns. All committees are to ensure the prompt start and execution of the campaigns.

**New
India @ 75**

**EDUCATED YOUTH
EDUCATED NATION**



ESTABLISHMENT OF 'SEHAT KENDRA' IN COLLEGES – BIHAR SACS

Bihar State AIDS Control Society (BSACS) in collaboration with State Health Society Bihar (SHSB) and Population Foundation of India (PFI) has established 'Sehat Kendra' in 28 colleges of Bihar. The Sehat Kendra are envisioned to act as a safe space for college students to discuss, deliberate and spread awareness on a range of issues pertaining to their health needs and entitlements. The

young population has limited access to correct and accurate information on health issues like sexual and reproductive health, right age of marriage, choice of contraception, mental health, gender, substance abuse etc. Due to the lack of information and support mechanisms to deal with the problems, dangerous and unsafe situations.

These 'Sehat Kendras' will work under the ambit of Red Ribbon Clubs, supported by a cohort of Peer Educators. The objectives of establishing the Sehat Kendra are as follows:

- ▶ Promote access to accurate information on sexual and reproductive health
- ▶ Open discussions on issues related to adolescents and youth
- ▶ Promote positive attitudes towards gender equality and life skills
- ▶ Generate awareness on other critical health issues such as Nutrition, Mental Health,

Substance abuse, Non-Communicable Diseases, HIV-AIDS, Importance of Blood Donation and social issues like Early marriage, Violence and Gender based Discrimination among others.



JOINT WORKING GROUP MEETING – SIKKIM SACS

Sikkim SACS had successfully organized a Joint Working Group meeting on 26th July, 2021. The meeting was attended by the representatives from Education Department, Department of Sports and Youth Affairs, NYK, NSS, SCERT, Voluntary Blood Donors Association of Sikkim and SACS officers. The main agenda for the meeting is to have better synergy among the line department, NGO and SACS while implementing youth centric programmes, related specifically to HIV/AIDS, Substance Abuse, Tuberculosis, Adolescent Education Programme etc.



SENSITIZATION OF POLICE TRAINEES - KARNATAKA SACS



INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST DRUG ABUSE AND ILLICIT TRAFFICKING

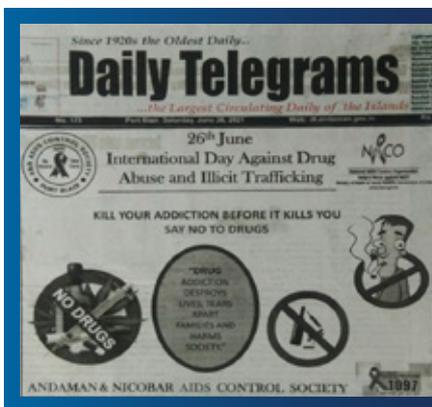
International Day against Drug Abuse (IDDA) and Illicit Trafficking is observed every year on 26th June. It is an International Day propounded by United Nations in order to fight against the substance abuse as well as the unlawful trade of drugs.

This year's theme for IDDA was 'Share Facts on Drugs, Save Lives'. The theme aimed at combating misinformation and promoted sharing of correct facts on drugs — from health risks and solutions to tackling

the world drug problem, to evidence-based prevention, treatment, and care. COVID-19 has brought unprecedented public awareness on health, protective measures for staying healthy and most importantly, protecting each other.

State AIDS Control Societies across the country conducted online and offline activities at block and district level in order to raise awareness around the issue.

Here are some glimpses of the activities conducted at the State level



Andaman & Nicobar AIDS Control Society printed a quarter page advertisement in a local newspaper

Display of banners and hoarding at various strategic locations by Andaman & Nicobar SACS



Awareness sessions conducted by TI NGOs at various locations in Meghalaya

An interactive session conducted by one of the peer educators of Meghalaya SACS about the ill effects of drugs



In Punjab, an advertisement on drug abuse was released on 15 web portals by PSACS



A total of 24,600 youth from the state of Punjab participated in different awareness activities conducted online around the theme of drug abuse and illicit trafficking



Punjab



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