Addressing Concerns of Persons with Disabilities during COVID 19 - Government of India’s Response

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COVID 19 : Impact on Persons with Disabilities

- Multi dimensional impact including loss of life, health hazards and economic damage.
- Challenges like fear from the virus, collective grief, prolonged physical distancing and social isolation compounded the impact.
- Persons with disabilities more vulnerable due to their physical, sensory and cognitive limitations.
- Restricted access to PwDs on several fronts such as health care services, livelihood, rehabilitative services, education, food and basic amenities, mobility, information etc.
- In India 26.8 million PwDs as per Census, 2011, 69% of them live in rural/remote areas. Reaching out to them was a challenge.
- The first case of COVID 19 detected in January, 2020, the problem escalated to a pandemic in March, 2020.
COVID 19 - Legal Course from PwD’s Perspective

• Government of India declared COVID 19 pandemic as a National Disaster.
• The National Disaster Management Authority evolved a Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DiDRR) Strategy in 2019 which envisions addressing concerns of PwDs during National Disaster situations.
• Section 8 of the Act deals with protection and safety of PwDs during natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies.
• The provisions of RPwD Act applicable during the pandemic situation to protect their rights and entitlements include access to health care, education, livelihood, etc.
COVID 19 : Response of the Nodal Agency

• Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), the nodal Central Department on policy matters concerning empowerment of PwDs.

• DEPwD issued **Comprehensive Disability Inclusive Guidelines** for Protection and Safety of PwDs in the country during COVID 19.

• These guidelines provide for:-
  - Making available all information about COVID 19 in **accessible format**.
  - Ensuring essential support services and physical and communication accessibility during quarantine.
  - Allowing care givers to reach out to PwDs during lockdown.
  - Ensuring PwDs to have access to food, water & medicine.
  - Ensuring priority in treatment.
  - Exempting employees with disabilities from essential services work.
  - Developing online counseling mechanism involving organizations of PwDs.
KIRAN Mental Health Helpline: Ensuing Counseling Services

• A 24 x 7 toll-free Helpline 1800 599 0019 launched on 7\textsuperscript{th} September, 2020 to provide online counseling services to persons with mental illness.
• Service is being provided in 13 languages by 640 clinical/rehab psychologists and 668 psychiatrists.
• Over 68,000 PwDs/their kith and kin have availed services of the Helpline.
• Our experience on this helpline indicates:-
  • The younger generation i.e. 15 – 40 years is mostly impacted i.e. 76\% of the calls belong to this category.
  • 31\% of the cases relate to anxiety, whereas, 23.4\% relate to depression.
  • 33\% belong to student group and 18\% unemployed. Majority are male (69.3\%).
ADIP Programme – Continuity in Distribution of Aids and Assistive Devices

• Government of India implements ADIP programme for distribution of aids and assistive devices to persons with disabilities.

• A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) was developed to ensure continuity in distribution of aids and assistive devices during COVID 19 in a sanitized environment while maintaining social distancing.

• The SOP provides for distribution of aids and assistive devices at the nearest possible place in small batches not exceeding 40.

• SOP for assessment of the beneficiaries was also developed.

• During this period, 0.37 million PwDs have been provided aids and assistive devices through 1888 camps by ensuring social distancing norms.
Educational Empowerment

• The Central Government provides **Scholarships** to students with disabilities for pursuing education from Pre-Matric to Doctorate level including higher education overseas.
• The scholarship programme is implemented through **National Scholarship Portal**.
• Last date for receipt of applications was extended from November last year to February this year.
• 26,000 scholarships disbursed during 2020-21 and 16,000 scholarships till date during the current financial year.
• Central Government also implements **Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme** under which grant in aid is provided to NGOs running special schools.
• The Government decided to continue with the grant in aid to the NGOs running special schools to ensure continuity in education of students with disabilities.
Continuity in Rehabilitative Services

- **9 National Institutes (NIs)** (Three for locomotor disability and one each for visual, hearing, intellectual, multiple disability, mental illness and sign language research and training).
- **21 Composite Regional Centres (CRCs)** working across India under these National Institutes.
- These National Institutes and the CRCs provide rehabilitative services to persons with disabilities including counseling services to their parents/guardians.
- All these National Institutes and CRCs continued with their services even during lockdown owing to COVID 19.
- More than **3.1 million** persons with disabilities benefitted by these institutes since the onset of pandemic.
Other Measures

• Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation (ALIMCO) a parastatal of the Ministry undertook relief measures for persons affected by COVID 19 by distributing food and medicines, supplying oxygen concentrators besides supporting infrastructure for COVID centres.
• The States/UTs launched dedicated Helplines for persons with disabilities to address their concerns.
• Accessible (Sign Language) videos of all COVID 19 related information such as Government instructions, advisories, best practices developed and uploaded on YouTube and websites of the National Institutes.
Measures undertaken by Other Central Ministries/Departments
Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW) issued guidelines from time to time including those for vulnerable groups.

Measures undertaken include:

- Ensuring delivery of essential services while maintaining physical distancing.
- Ensuring free investigations and medicines at Government care centres.
- Linking all primary health care centres with telemedicine hub to facilitate consultation between the patient and the provider.
- Advising Asha workers to undertake home visits for follow-up care.
- Directing Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) or Community Health Officers (CHOs) to undertake two visits every month to households having PwDs or senior citizens.
- Continuing services to patients with blood disorders such as blood transfusion.
- Ensuring vaccination of PwDs at their nearest places.
• Ministry of Education issued guidelines for the development of e-content for children with disabilities.

• Ministry of Consumer Affairs Food and Public Distribution extended the benefit of its flagship schemes Antyodaya Anna Yojana and Priority Households scheme under National Food Security Act, 2013 for providing free ration during this period to persons with disabilities.

• Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievance and Pensions exempted employees with disabilities from attending office upto 30.06.2021 and allowed them to work from home.
Make the Rights Real
Leave No One Behind

Thank You
Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities
Government of India