Disha Foundation

Enhancing Development: Building Bridges, Improving lives…

A Brief Profile on Our Health Initiatives

Disha Foundation is a registered non-profit organization working pan-India in areas of health, livelihood, food security, education, housing and access to public services. Disha's focus is mainly marginalized social groups such as migrant workers, unorganised sector workers, persons with disabilities and prison inmates.

Disha's Health Portfolio

Disha has worked in diverse areas of healthcare including communicable and non-communicable diseases. Disha's main focus in recent past has been on tuberculosis, breast cancer and now cardiovascular diseases. Disha has also worked on research and advocacy related to increasing access to healthcare services by marginalized social groups.

Initiatives to address Non-Communicable Diseases

Campaign for eliminating trans-fat and improving cardiovascular health in India: Disha Foundation is working on a campaign to promote cardiovascular health prevention in India including trans-fat elimination and hypertension reduction in 5 states of India. Hypertension is an increasing concern in India and trans-fats act as a major risk factor, increasing bad cholesterol and raising the risk of hypertension and cardiovascular disease. Currently, the level of permissible trans-fats in India as per the Food Standards and Safety Authority of India (FSSAI) is 5% since 2017. However, the WHO has urged all nations to eliminate trans-fat from food products by 2023. Based on this directive, FSSAI has proposed to limit trans-fats to 2% by weight so that India is trans-fat free by 2022, a year earlier than the WHO deadline

This campaign mainly involves the engagement of media, journalists, social media and other gate-keepers of media, in order to create awareness about the public health danger posed by trans-fat and its effects on cardiovascular health including obesity, hypertension, stroke and heart disease. The campaign also involves advocating for reducing of trans-fat in foods in partnership with policymakers, regulators such as FSSAI and major food industry stakeholders. Disha also plans to work with state level cardiovascular disease prevention programs for its effective implementation.

Breast Cancer Screening: Breast examination in partnership with Discovering Hands and Bayer Foundation (2015-17): Disha Foundation partnered with Discovering Hands and Bayer Foundation to train blind women to conduct breast examination. This project was based on the concept of using the tactile expertise of the visually impaired in order to detect smaller lumps in the breast through physical examination which a physician is unable to detect. It is based on the idea that those who are visually challenged usually have a greater sense of touch due to their incapacity to see things and by only being able to feel them. After piloting this in a few other countries, Disha Foundation piloted this project in India with an aim to empowering the visually impaired in order to make them independent and self- sustained, as well as, increasing breast cancer awareness across all sections of our society.

Migrant Friendly Health Programmes: Mother and Child Health and Occupational HealthProgramme Health care utilization rates among urban migrant workers are often found to be poor. To some extent, this can be attributed to migrants feeling alienated from the government health system at temporary destinations and private facilities being too expensive. Migrant populations often cannot access the services /programmes due to their migration status, timings of their work and distance to services. Constantly changing destinations is also a problem.

Disha Foundation has initiated migrant friendly health programmes in Maharashtra in terms of mother and child health and Occupational health.

Migrant's awareness building about health issue and empowerment for utilisation of government health services is major component of the programme. Active involvement of migrants' employers (such as construction companies, hotel industry, farmers etc) is key feature of this programme.

Sensitisation of government health providers is also initiated. A formal referral system for utilization of government health services is introduced, which is approved by district health services. A triplicate referral form is developed for migrants, government health services (civil hospital, urban health center etc) and Disha. Migrants are referred to health services by Disha through its trained community leaders. The referral system is getting popular among migrants as it helps them to get direct treatment from doctor without much discussion, as the medical history and related details are provided in the form. The backside of form also contains contact information of all government health services; the referral service provides increased access levels to health care for migrants, and it also helps for increased awareness level to government health system.

Initiatives to address communicable diseases

Tuberculosis

Universal access to TB care (UATBC) project for providing free TB care services for patients managed in private sector in Nagpur city – Pilot project (2017-20)

India is the country with highest burden of tuberculosis (TB) in the world. In order to control TB, the Government of India (GoI), in partnership with Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) and World Health Organization (WHO) launched UATBC with Nagpur being one of the first pilot areas. Disha Foundation one of the few NGOs in India working on UATBC. We are involved with city TB office, Nagpur Municipal Corporation, under RNTCP NGO PP partnership options as interface agency between public and private sector with following objectives: Based on our involvement in this project we are now involved in the scale-up of this project in other parts of India – other parts of Maharashtra and Jharkhand.

- Promotion of Standards of TB Care for diagnosis and treatment among private health care providers in Nagpur
- Provide free Rapid diagnostic test for TB through RNTCP CBNAAT Labs for patients from private sector
- Support private sector patients for free first line anti-TB drugs under UATBC
- Adherence support for private sector patients notified under UATBC
- In the past 1.5 years, Disha Foundation has carried out the following activities in this project in Nagpur city to substantially improve the TB case notification:
- Advocacy, Communication and Social Mobilization for UATBC and STCI
- Established mechanism to offer diagnostic testing through Government CBNAAT/C&DST labs for presumptive TB and MDR TB Patients from private sector to improve microbiological confirmation of TB under UATBC
- Support PPs involved under UATBC for Notification of TB Cases
- Adherence Support for all TB Patients managed in Private Sector in Nagpur

TB Awareness Campaign – Together We Can End TB (2016-17)

Disha Foundation was involved in running this campaign in the Nagpur Municipal Corporation with support from CSR of Janssen Pharmaceuticals. IEC was the main component of this project for improvement in early identification of symptomatic cases of TB and improve referrals for early case detection, communication for treatment adherence and combating stigma and discrimination. We ran this campaign in Nagpur for a month in line with GoI's "TB Harega Desh Jitega" campaign featuring Mr. Amitabh Bachchan as campaign ambassador. This campaign involved running IEC ads on FM Radio, movie theatres, city buses, auto-rickshaws, hospitals and hoardings.

Reaching the Unreached: Partnership for active TB case finding in Maharashtra through outsourcing, X-Ray testing from private sector (2017-18)

Disha Foundation worked with RNTCP and CSR of Johnson & Johnson to actively detect cases in 53 districts of Maharashtra. Main objective was to support RNTCP Maharashtra for free X-ray testing of presumptive TB cases at private X-ray facilities under active case finding campaign. A total of 38747 presumptive TB cases were identified, of which 17252 were offered free X-ray from private X-ray facilities, of which 8830 X-rays were done and additional 535 TB cases were identified for treatment.

HIV/AIDS and sexual and reproductive health

Prison Health

Disha had intervention with the jail inmates both at male and female ward for prison inmates at central jail, Nasik during 2002-03. Project is designed to address and meet the health needs of jail inmates specially focused on HIV/AIDS, STDs and socio-physiological health.

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