



Normative Input
For
14th session of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing
Focus Area
RIGHT TO HEALTH AND ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES

India's older population (aged 60 and above) is rapidly growing, projected to reach 319 million by 2050, according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), highlighting the importance of addressing their rights and needs.

In India around 70% of older persons rely on family for financial support, indicating economic vulnerability and dependency on familial structures for livelihood. Despite government initiatives such as the National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE), access to healthcare remains a challenge, with only around 20% of older persons having health insurance coverage, according to the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO).

The ever-growing elderly population puts immense strain on the healthcare system. Growing old is a progressive process associated with a decline in functioning, impaired maintenance and repair systems, and increased susceptibility to disease. They need healthcare and medical support more in comparison to other age groups.

About 90% of the elderly are from the unorganized sector or abandoned by their children, without adequate food, clothing or shelter, healthcare, or medical treatment. The absence of scarcity of government-supported social security and geriatric medical services compounds the problem. Ironically, Geriatrics is ignored in the same manner as the elderly are subjected to neglect and abuse.



Agewell Foundation

(In Special Consultative Status with the ECOSOC at United Nations since 2011)

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Current Healthcare Framework in India

- **Access to Healthcare:** According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), only about 37% of older persons in India have access to healthcare services, indicating significant gaps in healthcare accessibility for this demographic.
- **Health Insurance Coverage:** The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) reports that only around 20% of older persons in India have health insurance coverage, highlighting challenges in accessing affordable healthcare services.
- **Chronic Health Conditions:** The Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI) found that nearly 55% of older adults in India suffer from multiple chronic health conditions, underscoring the importance of comprehensive healthcare services tailored to their needs.
- **Gender Disparities:** Women in old age face greater barriers to accessing healthcare services compared to men, with factors such as lower socioeconomic status and limited decision-making power exacerbating disparities, according to studies conducted in India.
- **Government Initiatives:** The National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE) aims to provide accessible, affordable, and high-quality healthcare services for older persons in India, focusing on preventive, curative, and rehabilitative care to improve their health outcomes.

Awareness about older persons' rights is low, with a survey by Agewell Foundation revealing that over 60% of older persons in India are unaware of their rights and entitlements, hindering their ability to access support and services.

Emerging issues facing older persons in India include digital exclusion, elder abuse, and mental health challenges, highlighting the need for comprehensive policies and programs to address their evolving needs in an increasingly digital and interconnected society.

Status of existing healthcare schemes/provisions for Older Persons

As per the Agewell Foundation's study (2023), more than 32% of elderly respondents expressed their satisfaction with the existing healthcare schemes/facilities/provisions available for the elderly.

- Approx. 33% of respondents said that the status of the existing healthcare system is average in their opinion.
- According to 30.1% of respondents in India, existing healthcare schemes/facilities/provisions are not adequate, so far as the healthcare requirements of older persons are concerned.

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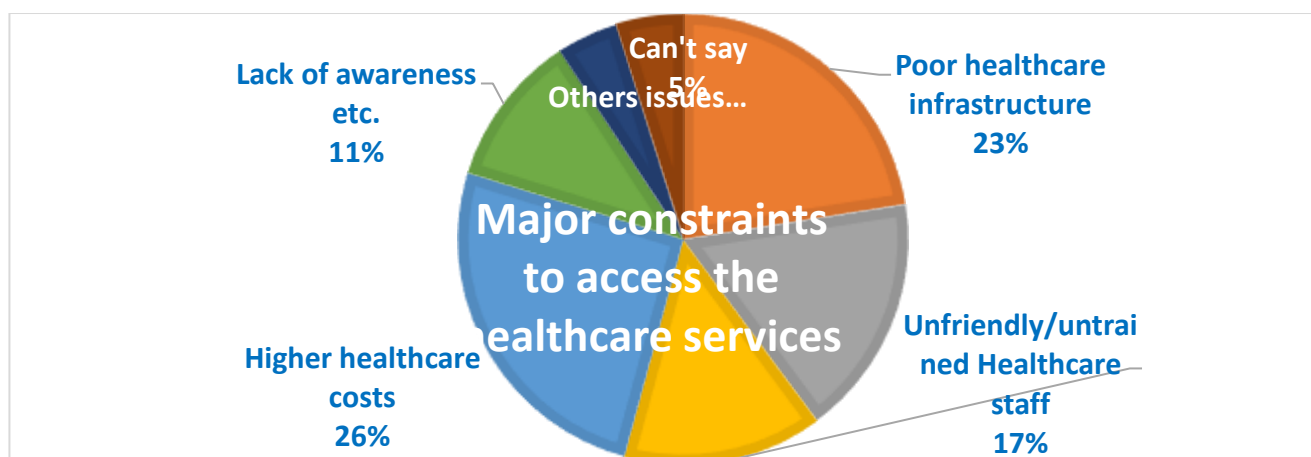
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- In rural areas, the situation is comparatively dismal. Less than 1/4th of respondents (24.1%) claimed that the status of healthcare services in rural areas is good or better. In urban areas, according to 40.7% of elderly respondents, the situation of the healthcare system was good or better.

Major Constraints for Old People to Access the Healthcare Services in Old Age

There are many constraints or barriers to accessing healthcare services in old age. When elderly respondents were asked to comment on these, it was found that the most common constraint is the higher cost of healthcare services/products.



- During the survey, 26.4% of respondents said that in their opinion the high cost of medicines/healthcare equipment and services is the most common barrier to accessing health services.
- According to 23.5% of elderly respondents, poor healthcare infrastructure is a major constraint or hurdle in old age.
- 18.2% of the respondents complained that in their opinion unfriendly/untrained healthcare staff/workers are responsible for poor access to healthcare services in India.

Measures to ensure better access to healthcare services

The survey questionnaire was also designed to collect older people's feedback on possible measures and solutions to ensure better access to healthcare services in old age.

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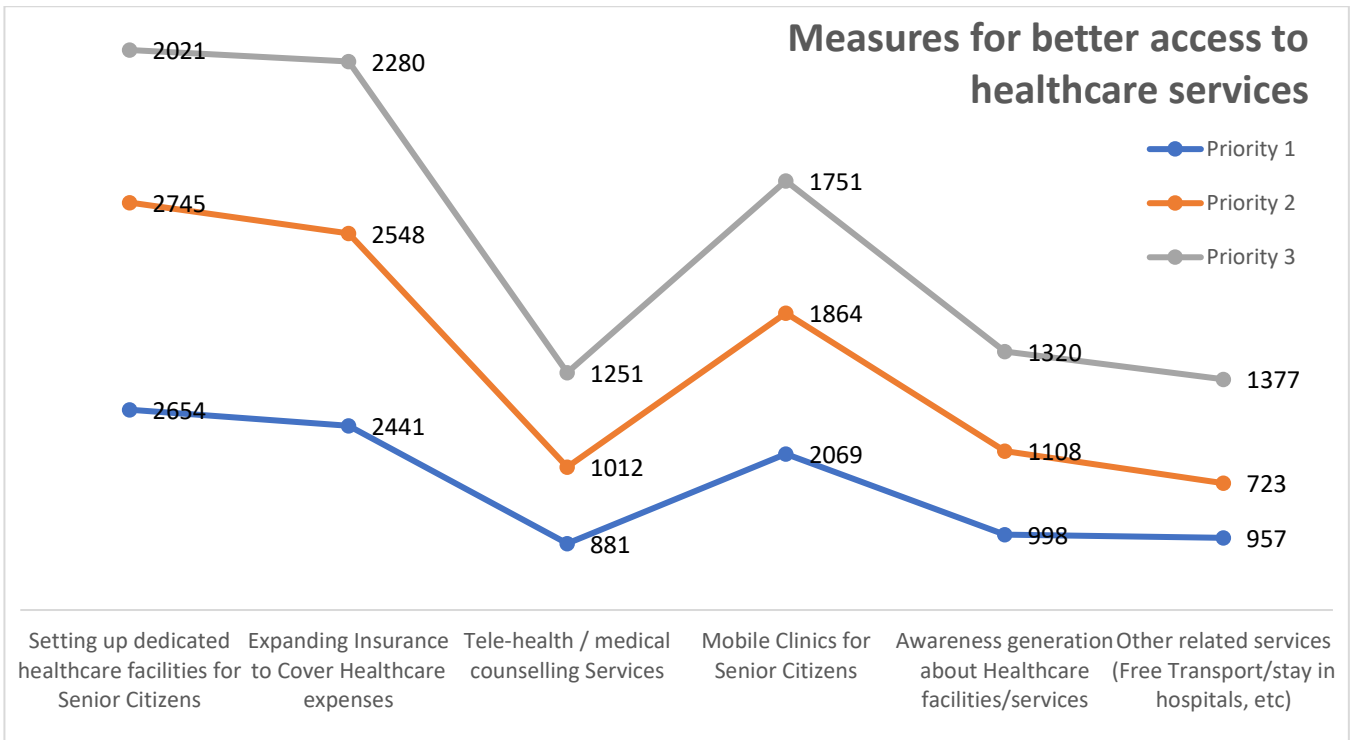
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- A comparatively higher number of elderly respondents (26.5%) suggested setting up dedicated healthcare facilities for older people. It was their 1st priority among other suggestions.
- Among all respondents, 24.4% of the elderly suggested that governments should give priority to expanding health insurance to cover healthcare expenses in old age.
- 20.7% of elderly respondents gave 1st priority to mobile clinics for older persons, particularly in rural and remote areas of the country.
- Approx. 10% of the elderly respondents were of the view that awareness about healthcare services/schemes must be increased among older people and their family members on a priority basis.



- As 2nd priority suggestion/recommendation, 27.45% of elderly respondents chose setting up dedicated healthcare services for older persons. 23.5% of elderly respondents voted for expanding health insurance coverage in old age.

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To ensure better access to health services, particularly for older people, governments and concerned stakeholders need to focus on the following issues:

- Setting up more dedicated healthcare services and facilities for older people
- Setting up a network of Caregivers for Older Persons to look after elderly patients living alone without any family support in old age
- Medical and health insurance policies/ schemes for more years in old age
- Creating awareness about healthcare services and facilities, particularly available for older persons in rural and remote areas
- Free/concessional transportation services should be provided to elderly patients, particularly those living in rural/remote areas
- Setting up tele healthcare initiatives like counseling services for older people
- Setting up dedicated Mobile clinics across the country, with special care for older people.
- Provisions of medicines/medical equipment/healthcare material like Adult Diapers free of cost/concessional rates for poor older people

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