



## Press Release

### World Health Day consultation calls for greater attention to depression

**New Delhi, 7 April 2017:** Commemorating the World Health Day 2017, the World Health Organization Country Office for India and Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India called for increasing awareness and greater attention to mental health issues, especially depression.

The theme for this year's World Health Day is **Depression: Let's talk**.

Speaking at a national consultation, Mr J.P. Nadda, Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare stated that the aim of the ministry is to ensure implementation of the Mental Health Policy in letter and spirit, and focus is also on working with civil society organizations.

“As part of its renewed strategy for mental healthcare services, the government is strengthening Primary Health Centres and Community Health Centres,” he said.

At the core of the World Health Day campaign is the importance of talking – breaking the stigma around depression – as a vital component of recovery. The stigma surrounding mental illness, including depression, remains a barrier to people seeking help throughout the world.

In his address, Dr Henk Bekedam, WHO Representative to India said, “Being the single largest cause of morbidity globally, depression is a public health priority that concerns each one of us. All of us are stakeholders. The first step towards treatment and recovery is often talking to a person you trust.”

“While the government legislates, creates an enabling environment, and makes professional services available, the onus is on each one of us to reach out, be it a friend, a colleague, a neighbour or family and make a difference, even save a life. It is equally important that the patient seeks help when depressed,” added Dr Bekedam.

In this context, Dr Bekedam highlighted three recent developments that bode well for India in the area of mental health: The National Health Policy 2017 prioritizes mental health services as a component of addressing noncommunicable diseases; Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Mann Ki Baat address spoke at length on how to prevent and manage depression, and the path-breaking Mental Health Care Bill 2017, which decriminalizes attempt to suicide and has a rights-based approach.



WHO also commends the government for the comprehensive National Mental Health Policy 2014 and the Mental Health Action Plan 365.

As a part of the World Health Day event, a panel discussion was organized to deliberate on different facets of depression and highlight areas that need urgent attention.

On the occasion, WHO India honoured Public Health Champions who have made substantial contribution to public health in the country: Dr Chandrakant S. Pandav, Lok Biradari Prakalp, CanSupport and Armman. Dr Vandana Gopikumar received the award for exemplary work in the area of mental health.

The World Health Day event was also graced by Mr Faggan Singh Kulaste, Minister of State for Health & Family Welfare; Ms Anupriya Patel, Minister of State for Health & Family Welfare; Dr Soumya Swaminathan, Director General, Indian Council of Medical Research and Secretary, Department of Health Research; Dr Jagdish Prasad, Director General Health Services, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW); Dr Arun Panda, Additional Secretary and Mission Director, National Health Mission, MoHFW; Sanjeeva Kumar, Additional Secretary, MoHFW; representatives from Health Ministry, UN and development agencies; mental health professionals from the central and state government; academicians and researchers; NGOs and civil society organizations, and media.

### **About the World Health Day 2017**

Depression is a common mental illness characterized by persistent sadness and a loss of interest in activities that people normally enjoy, accompanied by an inability to carry out daily activities for 14 days or longer. According to the latest estimates from WHO, more than 300 million people are now living with depression globally, an increase of more than 18% between 2005 and 2015. In India, the total number of people living with depression is over 56 million, about 4.5% of the total population (2015).

For more information, please contact: Rajeev Varma, Senior Communications Officer, WHO Country Office for India, New Delhi, Tel: [91-11- 47594800](tel:91-11-47594800), mobile + [91 8826611139](tel:918826611139), e-mail: [varmar@who.int](mailto:varmar@who.int)

### **For more information on World Health Day 2017:**

[http://www.searo.who.int/india/mediacentre/events/world\\_health\\_day/whd\\_2017/en/](http://www.searo.who.int/india/mediacentre/events/world_health_day/whd_2017/en/)

All press releases, fact sheets and other WHO media material may be found at <http://www.searo.who.int/india>