# Benchmarking exercise on India's Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) targets (2019-2020)
## *Policy Brief*

### Executive Summary

India needs to accelerate efforts to reach the target of one-third reduction in premature NCD mortality (between 30-70 years) by 2030 (SDG 3.4).[i] With the integration of air pollution and mental health and the adoption of the ***5x5 matrix*** for risk factors and NCDs, the approach needs recalibration. This policy brief provides a synthesis and situational analysis in the context of the findings of the benchmarking exercise undertaken by civil society in India. **This policy brief highlights India's response to NCDs under four key pillars: 1) governance; 2) prevention and reduction of risk factors; 3) monitoring, evaluation and surveillance; and 4) health systems.** While the results of the National NCD Monitoring Survey (NNMS) are awaited, which will provide a measurement of the national NCD targets, the trajectory of India's overall response to NCDs needs to be accelerated through concerted multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder action, engaging both the health and non-health sectors. While reasonable progress has been made in key areas, there is an imperative need to synergise action across NCDs and their risk factors, effectively engaging key government as well as non-government partners and stakeholders.

### Introduction

NCDs lead to around 63% of all deaths in India.[ii]  The Third UN High level Meeting (HLM) declaration in September 2018 had shed light on critical areas of national, regional and global action on NCDs, with a lens on the 2025 targets and 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. It brought about a shift from a limited focus on 4X4 action to a more comprehensive 5X5 approach. This incorporated environmental risk factors, including indoor and outdoor air pollution among major NCD risk factors and mental health as the fifth major NCD. The year 2020 is  important  for NCD prevention and control in India and globally. It was earmarked as the time period for reaching the intermediate national NCD targets, as per the National Multisectoral Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs (NMAP) (2017-2022). It also marks the final year of the WHO Global Action Plan for NCD Prevention and Control (2013-2020), that coincides with Member States reporting progress on the global targets, to WHO.[iii]

India adopted its 10 national NCD targets in 2013 and thereafter, the National Multi-sectoral Action Plan for Prevention and Control of Common NCDs (2017-2022). The integration of NCD priorities within the development agenda was recognised with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015.

The Government of India has prioritised addressing the burden of NCDs and strengthening health system through primary healthcare and Universal Health Coverage. Ayushman Bharat (AB)/National Health Protection Mission is an attempt to move from a selective approach to health care to deliver comprehensive range of services spanning preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative care. Under AB, Health & Wellness Centres (HWCs) are being created to deliver Comprehensive Primary Health Care, that is universal and free to users, with a focus on wellness and the delivery of an expanded range of services closer to the community.

i.  Several policies and programmatic developments/communications/reports have outlined the Government's efforts to integrate NCD prevention and control into the broader health and development agenda to achieve the 25x25 target (reducing the number of global premature deaths from NCDs by 25% by 2025 )and the third-by-thirty goal (Reduce by one third premature mortality from NCDs). The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's (MoHFW) National Monitoring Framework for NCDs and the setting up of SDG monitoring indicators (led by the NITI Aayog and the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), are the existing mechanisms to monitor progress towards the NCD targets and SDGs.[iv] The National Centre for Disease Informatics and Research (NCDIR), under the aegis of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) undertook the National NCD Monitoring Survey (NNMS) in 2017-18, in 27 states of the country to generate national estimates for key NCD related indicators and risk factors. The results of this resourceful surveillance exercise are expected to be released in due course. However, given the inter-linkages and complexities of NCDs and development, on-ground, and the well-established importance of 360 degrees multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder action, the need for a benchmarking exercise to track the trajectory which traces intent, action and even inaction towards the targets and goals, is equally critical.

A benchmarking exercise (2020) was conducted applying the adapted benchmarking tool of the NCD Alliance[v] to understand and assess India's response to NCDs, from a civil society perspective. Several key policy and programmatic developments have been spearheaded by GoI to address the burden of NCDs. This benchmarking exercise intends to document some of these key developments, identifying progress and opportunities for further action. It has tried to establish an evidence-based platform for civil society to monitor progress on NCD prevention and control and foster a 'whole-of-society' approach to the issue. The exercise entailed: (1) a desk review of national and international reports, policy documents, action plans, strategies etc, and (2) inputs from key experts related to major themes and indicators. Data was collated based on the themes and indicators within four broad domains:

*1. Governance*

➢ *NCDs as a national health priority*

National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS) was launched in 2010 in 100 districts across 21 States, in order to prevent and control the major NCDs. The main focus of the programme is on health promotion, early diagnosis, management and referral of cases, besides strengthening the infrastructure and capacity building. In 2013, India became the first country globally to adapt the Global Monitoring Framework on NCDs and develop specific national targets and indicators aimed at reducing the premature deaths from NCDs by 25% by 2025 (25 X 25 target). India's **National Multisectoral Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs (2017-2022)**, emphasises the significance of a 'Whole-of-Government' and 'Whole-of-Society' approach to address NCDs. **The National Health Policy (NHP 2017)** recognises the growing burden of NCDs and recommends the establishment of a National Institute of Chronic Diseases to generate evidence for cost-effective interventions and highlight best practices for NCDs. The NHP 2017 highlighted Health Promotion as a key investment. It also calls for early detection of NCDs predominant in urban areas under the National Urban Health Mission.[vi] The National Rural Health Mission (NHRM) under the National Health Mission also covers care for NCDs, including screening and treatment of women for common cancers such as cervix and breast cancer. In additional adolescent health issues such mental health and NCDs is also covered.

➢ *NCDs as a development priority*

The National Institution for Transforming India (also called as NITI Aayog) periodically collects data on the status of SDGs in India and with the MoSPI has undertaken a **'Mapping of Central Sector Schemes and Ministries of Government of India'**. **NITI Aayog's SDG India Index and Dashboard (2019-20)** documents the progress made by India's States and Union Territories towards achieving the 2030 SDG targets. The SDG India Index captures 16 out of 17 SDGs with a qualitative assessment on Goal 17.[vii]

India's composite score **has improved from 57 in 2018 to 60 in 2019, which is documented as noticeable progress** (NITI Aayog, SDG India Index 2019-20). However, both the 2018 and 2019 Index, have not measured progress on Goal 3.4 indicators, while select other indicators within SDG 3 have been assessed.

**The United Nations Development Action Framework (UNDAF) 2013-17** guides the collective work of the United Nations in India. Under the UNDAF, the UN Agencies support work for national development priorities. NCDs were *not* included in UNDAF 2013-17.[viii] **In 2018, NITI AAYOG and United Nations in India signed the *Government of India-United Nations Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDF) for 2018-2022.* [ix]** and NCDs are explicitly included under the Health domain.

➢ *Multi-stakeholder engagements for NCD prevention and control*

**Civil society led efforts** such as the formation of the Healthy India Alliance (India NCD Alliance: HIA is a coalition of 16 India based civil society organisations, more information about the Alliance available at [www.healthyindiaalliance.org](www.healthyindiaalliance.org)) and India Network of NCDs and Youth (INNY) have been prioritising meaning involvement of civil society, people living with NCDs (PLWNCDs) and youth in the National NCD response. However, there is a need to formalise and institutionalise comprehensive Government-CSO, and Government-PLWNCDs and youth-centric partnerships and collaborations.

Globally and nationally, there is a call for engaging with the **private sector** as a part of multi-sectoral strategies on NCDs. It is critical that this engagement is restricted to private sector entities free from conflict of interest and restricted to policy implementation only. Concrete and binding guidelines/regulations should be put in place to keep policy formulation free from industry interference.

2. *Prevention and Reduction of Risk Factors*

   **WHO's NCDs Country Profiles (2020)** shows a 23% probability of premature mortality from NCDs in India, with NCDs accounting for an estimated 63% of all deaths (CVDs 27%, cancers 9%, Chronic Respiratory Diseases 11%, Diabetes 3% and other NCDs 13%). **As per the report, 13,43,500 lives can be saved in India, by 2025 by implementing all of the sixteen WHO Best Buys strategies, that are cost-effective, affordable, feasible and scalable in all settings.**

   ➢ **Tobacco control**

   The Parliament of India enacted a comprehensive tobacco control legislation i.e. the **Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003 (COTPA)** in 2003, enforced in 2005. India also ratified the World Health Organization's **Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC)** in 2004. In 2007, the **National Tobacco Control Programme (NTCP)** has been brought into place to complement the law. Other efforts including ban on smokeless tobacco, implementation of 85% pictorial pack warnings with the National Tobacco Control Quitline have also been undertaken. In 2019, "The Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes (Production, manufacture, Import, Export, Transport, Sale, Distribution, Storage and Advertisement) Act 2019 was also enforced. However, there are various opportunities to achieve full implementation of the WHO FCTC, including scaling-up enforcement of tobacco control laws at the national and sub-national levels and the need for enhancing awareness about the multiple health and socio-economic consequences of tobacco use.

   ➢ **Alcohol Control**

   India was the first country committing to reducing alcohol use by 10% by 2025 and not just its harmful use. The Motor Vehicle (Amendment) Act 2019, drunken driving penalty has been increased to 6 months imprisonment. The penalty has been increased from INR 2000 to INR 10,000, for the first offence and two years imprisonment and/or fine of INR 15,000 for the second offence.[x] However, The **National Alcohol Control Policy** (under the prerogative of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment) has been drafted and is still under review.

   ➢ **Healthy diets**

   The National Nutrition Strategy 'Nourishing India' (2017) acknowledges the dual burden of NCDs. Initiative led by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) such as the Guidelines for Making Available Wholesome, Nutritious, Safe and Hygienic Food to School Children in India (2015); *Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations (2018).[xi]* and the recently launched multi-sectoral initiative called the **Eat Right Movement, Aaj se thoda kam** campaign are efforts towards promoting healthy eating habits among Indians.

   ➢ **Physical activity promotion**

   In November 2019, India launched the **Fit India Movement**, under the aegis of the Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports. As part of the movement, individuals and organisations are being encouraged to undertake various initiatives for their health and well-being as well as for the health and well-being of fellow citizens. Under this, schools can apply for *'Fit India School Certification'* based on selected parameters.[30] Additionally, Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has advised to reserve one period every day for health and physical education, especially for students of classes 9 to 12.[xii] Under AB, National School Health Programme Guidelines were issued in 2018 and the programme was launched in Feb, 2020. One of the themes under the curriculum includes – Promotion of healthy lifestyle and Prevention and Management of Substance Misuse.

   ➢ **Air pollution**

   In January 2019, the government launched the **National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)**, a five-year action plan to curb air pollution, build a pan-India air quality monitoring network, and improve citizen awareness. The programme focuses on 102 polluted Indian cities and has adopted a national level target of 20%–30% reduction of PM2.5 and PM10 concentration by 2024.[xiii] Multiple inter-ministerial initiatives and national acts and guidelines have been set up to tackle household air pollution and ambient air pollution including the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojna for LPG connections. These are important measures towards India's 10th NCD target.

3. *Monitoring, Evaluation and Surveillance*

   National-level NCD risk factor surveillance mechanism: **The National Non-Communicable Disease Monitoring Survey (NNMS)** has been conducted by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and assesses the national NCD targets and indicators. Accordingly, a total of 10 targets and 21 indicators are adopted under the National NCD Action Plan & NCD Monitoring Framework by MoHFW. The year 2010 serves as a baseline for assessing the progress made for achieving the NCD targets in 2015, 2020 and 2025. The survey was rolled out from October 2017 for a period of 6 months. The results are expected to be released in due course. [xiv] In addition, India has a Civil Registration System and a national representative sample registration system, under the Ministry Home Affairs, Government of India, which records mortality data (including NCD deaths). [xv]

However, the country still lacks an independent accountability mechanism on NCDs, the need for such a mechanism to document progress and impediments towards the path to the national NCD targets and related SDGs, is recommended.

4. *Health Systems*

As per the **National Health Profile (2019)**, India spends only **1.28%** of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (2017-18) as public expenditure on health.

NCDs within UHC: Government conceived **'Ayushman Bharat'** *(Healthy India)* – **the world's largest government funded health protection mission.** Ayushman Bharat – **Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY)** seeks to accelerate India's progress towards achievement of UHC and SDG Goal 3.

Twenty-one operational guidelines/training manuals/handbooks exist for the management of NCDs.

## CONCLUSION

**A Lancet paper, by the monitoring group, NCD Countdown 2030, has contended that India will fall short of the NCD targets pertaining to SDGs.** Efforts across major *domains* of *Governance; Prevention and Reduction of Risk Factors; Monitoring, Evaluation and Surveillance;* and **Health Systems**, need amplification. A balance needs to be struck between prevention and health system strengthening for NCDs. Given India's diverse geographic, sociocultural, economic and demographic profile, there is an urgent need for ***contextualising and percolating national multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder action, to the sub-national and grassroots levels***. In India, while substantial progress has been made in the area of tobacco control policies, there is an urgent need to scale-up action on promoting diet and physical activity as well as accelerating alcohol control efforts, in line with the ***WHO Best Buy interventions and strategies***. It is also critical to adopt a 'Whole-of-Society' approach to involve multi-sectoral constituencies including CSOs from the health and non-health sectors, youth and PLWNCDs in deciding action areas, as per their needs and priorities. An all-inclusive response to NCDs warrants integration of top-down as well as bottoms-up approaches. There is a need to identify and scale-up best practices in various domains, which emerge from the sub-national level, to inform policy and programmatic action.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is important to develop and implement a robust 'Whole-of-Society' approach to address India's NCD challenge, Table 1 outlines a set of recommendations for future response to NCDs and their risk factors among through multi-sectoral engagements. These are outlined for different stakeholders, by identifying some of the relevant and pertinent areas for support and contribution.

*Recommendations for accelerating action on India's NCD targets*

| Stakeholder | Actions |
|---|---|
| **Government**<br>**The concept of 'Health-in-all-Policies' should be the guiding principle to avoid conflict in governmental policies, across ministries, particularly on regulating commercially driven risk factors.** | |
| *Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW)* | • *Initiating process and discussions on COTPA amendment*<br>• *Promotion and adoption of a care-based proactive healthcare model in NCD programming.*<br>• *Evaluating the ban on ENDS – information from states*<br>• *Inclusion of mental health as a major NCD and air pollution as an important NCD risk factor in the National Multi-sectoral Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs.*<br>• *Finalise guidelines for daily physical activity, specific to the India population.*<br>• *Development of a comprehensive roadmap to link risk and vulnerability posed due to communicable diseases (in light of the current COVID-19 pandemic) to PLWNCDs.*<br>• *Effective implementation of tobacco control laws at the national and sub-national levels*<br>• *Finalise the National Alcohol Control Policy in collaboration with MoSJE*<br>• *Provide clear guidelines to facilitate engagement of CSOs, youth and PLWNCDs in the National NCD response both at national and state levels* |

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|---|---|
| **Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change** | • *Provide preventive messaging safeguarding the health of those exposed to hazardous levels of air pollution.*<br>• *In light of the degrading air pollution levels, specifically in the Northern parts of the country: provide State specific targets to be reached by 2024.*<br>• *Develop an action plan for engaging multiple stakeholders to actively partake in minimising air pollution.* |
| **Department of Revenue (Ministry of Finance)**<br>**Resource allocation for NCDs, capacity building**<br>**Taxation of unhealthy commodities** | • *High cess to be imposed on "sin category" products (including bidis, unhealthy food including sugary drinks and foods high in fat, sugar and salt).*<br>• *Supporting uniform taxation for alcohol products.* |
| **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** | • *Finalise the National Alcohol Control Policy and fast track its implementation through multi-stakeholder consultations.* |
| **Department of School Education and Literacy**<br>**(Ministry of Human Resources and Development)**<br>**Identify action areas for working with stakeholders**<br>**Tobacco, alcohol, PA, mental health, air pollution, T1D** | • *Ban on sale of unhealthy beverages and foods in and around educational institutes.*<br>• *Prioritising NCD prevention related campaigns and initiatives in educational institutes, including promotion of daily physical activity.* |
| **Ministry of Information and Broadcasting**<br>**Health promotion messages**<br>**Action areas across RFs** | • *Ban advertising (including surrogate advertising) of unhealthy foods and beverages*<br>• *Conduct multi-stakeholder consultation on banning marketing and sponsorship of unhealthy foods and beverages; to decide labelling guidelines etc*<br>• *Checking promotion of tobacco and alcohol through online streaming platforms.* |
| **Ministry of Commerce and Industry** | *Provide clear and easy to understand guidelines for Front of Pack Labelling (FoPL) on all packaged food products.* |
| **Civil Society**<br>**Guided by the 'Whole-of-Society' approach** | |
| **Researchers** | • *Conduct research on NCDs and other cross-cutting issues like communicable diseases.*<br>• *Study the impact of taxes on tobacco products under GST, as a tobacco control strategy.*<br>• *Research needed to identify how health programmes can reach disadvantaged groups and reduce disparities.*<br>• *Conduct air pollution health impact studies to call for stronger preventive and corrective measures at both centre and state levels* |
| **CSOs** | • *Bring on-board PLWNCDs and youth champions to highlight their needs, challenges and priorities, to be considered in policy related discussions.*<br>• *To build a holistic narrative around prevention and control of NCDs by engaging with non-health development sector partners.*<br>• *Assess in formulation accountability frameworks to ensure progress towards NCD targets is smooth and speedy.*<br>• *Prioritise the need to reach out to vulnerable and heard to reach populations to arrest the NCD epidemic.* |
| **PLWNCDs and Youth** | • *Contribute to health promotion initiates of the Government by building a public narrative around NCDs.*<br>• *PLWNCDs to work in collaboration with health professional to provide support services to those diagnosed with NCDs.*<br>• *Youth to be a part of health promotion and preventive messaging, while PLWNCDs and CSOs provide the much-needed mentoring.* |

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