**PRESS RELEASE**

**National Pilot Initiatives on Diabetic Retinopathy and Retinopathy of Prematurity Develops Health System Models to Prevent, Screen and Treat Sight of Millions of Indians**

***The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, the Public Health Foundation of India and Partners successfully complete a five-year national project to prevent people with diabetes and babies born prematurely from losing their sight.***

* **The DR and ROP initiatives helped strengthen health systems (particularly in tackling Non-Communicable Diseases) in 14 states, including Telangana and Andhra Pradesh**
* **The ROP and DR initiatives has convened several meetings to bring together various National Government health programmes: for blindness control, for NCDs and for child health**
* **The Diabetic Retinopathy initiative screened 60,970 people with diabetes and set the model for Diabetic Retinopathy management in India**
* **The Retinopathy of Prematurity initiative has screened 10,392 preterm infants in Sick Newborn Care Units and has developed Quality Improvement package for staff who care for preterm infants.**
* **National Program for Control of Blindness and Visual Impairment, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India is exploring scaling up the models pilot-tested**
* **The Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust-funded twin pilot initiatives on diabetic retinopathy and retinopathy of prematurity come to an end in June 2019**

**Hyderabad, 11 June 2019:** In a first of its kind initiative, to address the problem of avoidable blindness in India, the Ministry of Health, Government of India, Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), The Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust and partners successfully implemented two pilot initiatives focusing on a comprehensive health system approach to Diabetic Retinopathy (DR) and Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP). This was implemented in 14 states across the country between 2014-2019.

The initiatives were implemented by The Public Health Foundation of India’s Indian Institute of Public Health, Hyderabad (IIPH-H) with technical support from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) in 10 states for DR and 4 states for ROP. Apart from prevention, screening and treatment, the key successes of the initiatives were providing world-class training and equipment, effective advocacy and increasing public awareness about these two conditions. Importantly, they have set the standard for tackling India’s Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) burden through the health system, and have made a key impact on India’s public health policy framework.

A National Task Force for DR and for ROP were established by the Ministry of Health, and each appointed Technical Expert Groups to develop specific outputs, such as operational guidelines, and materials for health education and to increase public awareness on these conditions. District and State coordination meetings have also been held, to discuss progress and challenges, and how they could be overcome. Thetwin pilot initiatives on Diabetic Retinopathy (DR) and Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP) were part of a five-year, multi-million-pound grant bytheQueen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust.

Between June 12 and 14 the city will host a national dissemination meeting to mark the end of two large scale initiatives for the prevention of blindness from diabetic retinopathy (DR) and retinopathy of prematurity (ROP), which impact the vision of millions of Indians. The event will see participation from experts in eye care, neonatal care, diabetes and public health from the public and private sectors, and many other stakeholders and partners. Delegates at the meeting will hear from partners who have delivered these successful initiatives, which are already being scaled up in other districts and States across the country.

**Diabetic Retinopathy Initiative**

Approximately 65 million adults and 128,500 children in India are living with diabetes and one in five people with diabetes have some degree of DR (14.6 million in India) and one in ten (7.3 million) has the vision threatening form of DR.1

In 2014, PHFI conducted a situation analysis in 11 major cities across India, and identified major gaps in the awareness, knowledge and skills of physicians and eye care providers on DR. The analysis also noted a lack of awareness amongst people with diabetes of the risk to their sight from DR. The Diabetic Retinopathy Initiative was designed to develop and integrate services for the prevention, early detection and management of DR into government health systems. The project was implemented in 53 government facilities in 10 States in India, with 24 partners

**Key achievements of DR initiative**

* 60,970 people with diabetes have been screened, and 4072 have been treated for DR.
* 6069 Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) and Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) were trained to motivate people with diabetes to go for DR screening
* 164 optometrists/ophthalmic assistants were trained in DR screening
* 445 physicians received training under a Certificate Course in Diabetic Retinopathy to increase their knowledge on how to reduce the risk of DR and the need for annual retina examination
* 40 ophthalmologists in 10 states were trained in the diagnosis and management of DR and supplied the necessary equipment
* 60 Non Communicable Diseases Clinics at Community Health Centres (CHCs) have been strengthened under the Diabetic Retinopathy initiative
* Peer support groups for adults, and for young people with diabetes have been established
* Indian Institute of Public Health Hyderabad has an active dedicated national toll free helpline for diabetes and related complications

**Retinopathy of prematurity initiative**

Retinopathy of prematurity (ROP) is a major cause of blindness in children in India. Before PHFI’s ROP initiative, there were no national services in place to detect and treat ROP in India. There was little knowledge of the condition and how to prevent it within neonatal care facilities, nor understanding of the need to screen and treat the condition within the first 30 days of life.

A situational analysis conducted in eight states in 2014-15 showed that 11% of babies born in India are preterm, 10% of whom are at the risk of ROP.

The ROP initiative was implemented in 22 Special Newborn Care units in District Hospitals and Medical Colleges in four states involving 10 partners in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Telangana.

In May 2019, HRH Countess of Wessex visited Hyderabad’s ROP centers and interacted with parents of preterm infants, doctors and nurses

**Key achievements of ROP initiative**

* 10392 preterm infants were screened for ROP
* 317 babies received sight saving treatment
* 606 pediatricians have been trained, including under the Quality Improvement initiative
* 574 nurses in Special Newborn Care Units have been trained in how to prevent ROP and assist in screening
* 28 ophthalmologists have been trained to screen for ROP

**Dr Sangeetha Abrol, Deputy Director General, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India said**, “The DR-ROP initiatives are a signal achievement and a sign of India’s ability to pilot and execute complex, multi-state interventions targeting some of our most vulnerable populations. We congratulate all our partners and look forward to working with them in taking these lessons across the nation”

“The DR-ROP initiatives are one-of-their-kind. They have blazed a trail, and set an example not just for India, but also other middle-income countries that are struggling to tackle these conditions. It has been my privilege and honour to help deliver the first set of steps to tackle these complex and growing conditions”, **said Prof. GVS Murthy, Director, Indian Institute of Public Health, Hyderabad.**

**Clare Gilbert, Professor of International Eye Health, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine** said, “ROP and DR are two complex eye conditions that need a range of strategies and systems in place to prevent, identify, treat and manage over time. Working against great odds, PHFI and their partners in the government and NGO sectors have shown what is possible through collaboration and commitment, and everyone involved should feel very proud of what they have been able to achieve.”

**Andrew Cooper, Director of Programmes, The Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust said,** “The Trust is immensely proud of its partnerships with the government of India and PHFI. Our aim was to run projects that would have the biggest impact on the most lives, and the DR-ROP initiatives have been a great example of our mission to bring quality eye care to all those who need it. It’s a legacy which will touch the lives of millions, long into the future.”

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**About The Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust**

The Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust is a charitable foundation established in 2012 by Commonwealth Heads of Government to mark and celebrate Her Majesty The Queen’s 60-year contribution to the Commonwealth at the time of her Diamond Jubilee. The Trust has received donations from governments, corporate partners, trusts, foundations, community groups and individuals from across the Commonwealth, and its programmes work in alliance towards ending avoidable blindness and to empower a new generation of young leaders. The Trust’s aim is to leave a lasting legacy, owned by the whole Commonwealth, to honour Her Majesty The Queen.

In January 2020, the Trust will have successfully completed its time-limited programmes and will cease operating as a grant-making organisation. It will have achieved a significant, sustainable reduction in avoidable blindness across the Commonwealth, saving millions from losing their sight, and created and developed a cadre of remarkable young leaders as a legacy in honour of Her Majesty The Queen as Head of the Commonwealth.

For more information visit [www.jubileetribute.org](http://www.jubileetribute.org)

**About the Public Health Foundation of India**

The Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI) is working towards building a healthier India. It is helping to address the limited institutional and systems capacity in India by strengthening education and training, advancing research and technology and facilitating policy and practice in the area of Public Health. PHFI is headquartered in New Delhi with national presence through its constituent units of four regional Indian Institutes of Public Health (IIPH) and Centres of Applied Research in core public health themes. The Foundation, established in 2006 as a public private initiative, is governed by an independent board comprising of senior government officials, eminent Indian and International academic and leaders, civil society representatives and corporate leaders. For more information visit www.phfi.org

**References**

1. India State-Level Disease Burden Initiative Diabetes Collaborators. The increasing burden of diabetes and variations among the states of India: the Global Burden of Disease Study 1990-2016. Lancet Glob Health. 2018 Sep 11. pii: S2214- 109X(18)30387-5. doi: 10.1016/S2214-109X(18)30387-5.