**PRESS RELEASE**

**Retinopathy of Prematurity’ Programme for prevention of blindness in infants**

*One of its kind programme in India that tackles infant blindness*

**Pune, April 26, 2017:** Dr Deepak Sawant, Minister of State, Public Health and Family Welfare launched the Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP) India project at Aundh District Hospital today. Retinopathy of prematurity (ROP) is one of the leading causes of blindness in premature infants in India. The Public Health Foundation of India in association with The Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust, UK is spearheading the project to address this growing public health problem across India. Pune’s prestigious King Edward Memorial (KEM) and H V Desai hospitals have pledged their support to this project. Together, they will train staff to screen for ROP and provide support services and conduct research to prevent ROP in the state. This project will be implemented in five districts hospitals in the state: Pune, Thane, Nasik, Osmanabad and Nagpur.

Dr. Archana Patil, Additional Director, Health Services, Maharashtra; Dr GVS Murthy, Director, Indian Institute of Public Health; Mr. Nitin Desai, chairman and Col. (Retd.) Madan Deshpande, Chief Medical Director of PBMA’s H V Desai Hospital; Dr Andrew Cooper, Director of Programmes, Dr Astrid Bonfield, Chief Executive, The Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust addressed state and district health workers, industrialists and philanthropists who attended the launch.

KEM hospital will train neonatologists, paediatricians and nurses at the district hospitals and H V Desai hospital will mentor ophthalmologists in screening and treatment of ROP. Under the project, every premature baby weighing less than 2000 gms or born at or before 34 weeks of gestation will be screened for ROP within 30 days after birth. If ROP is detected, the project will aim to provide treatment within 48 hours. The project is also being run in Telangana, Odisha, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

Retinopathy of prematurity (ROP), caused by damage to the retina, can lead to total and irreversible blindness in preterm babies. The ROP project aims to prevent vision loss by raising awareness about this condition. A key goal of the ROP project is integration of treatment services into government health systems by capacity building and providing equipment. The project will do this by improving quality of care provided at Special Newborn Care Units (SNCUs) through capacity building of neonatologists, paediatricians and nurses. It will also fund equipment at district hospitals, including retina screening at the Special Newborn Care Units. ‘I am confident that the Retinopathy of Prematurity project will be successful in Maharashtra and help us to eliminate avoidable blindness in premature infants. I welcome the steps taken by IIPH-H in bringing us together to tackle this important issue.’ said Dr Deepak Sawant.

‘ROP is one of the most important avoidable causes of vision loss in preterm infants. It can lead to lifelong vision impairment and blindness,’ said Dr G V S Murthy, Director, Indian Institute of Public Health. ‘It is critical that the right care is provided at the right time. This project will implement and share best practices that will save many from going blind, unnecessarily’.

'Blindness due to retinopathy of prematurity ROP is increasing in India. More premature babies are surviving thanks to improved neonatal care, but knowledge of retinopathy of prematurity is sometimes lacking meaning that babies are needlessly losing their sight,' said Dr Astrid Bonfield, Chief Executive of The Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust. 'Our goal is increase awareness of the condition across India and develop programmes to detect and treat retinopathy of prematurity. We want to establish sustainable and scalable services for the detection and treatment of retinopathy of prematurity which are integrated into the Government of India’s health system and to make sure that preterm babies don’t go blind.'

This project aims to raise awareness about ROP by working closely with state and district officials across the country. In Maharashtra, the state government along with Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, will play an active role in implementing the project.

The ROP project was started in 2012 by the Public Health Foundation of India in association with the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust, UK.

ROP: Key Facts

1. Retinopathy of prematurity can lead to vision loss in preterm babies
2. It can affect preterm infants born at or before 34 weeks or weighing 2kgs or less at birth
3. Retinopathy of prematurity starts 2-4 weeks after birth
4. If ROP is detected treatment must be given within 48 hours

**Notes to editors**

For more information or to request interviews with Dr GVS Murthy, please contact Public Health Foundation of India Press Office

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**About The Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust:**

The Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust is a charitable foundation established in 2012 to mark and celebrate Her Majesty The Queen’s 60-year contribution to the Commonwealth. The Trust has received donations from governments, corporate partners, trusts, foundations, community groups and individuals from across the Commonwealth. Its mission is to enrich the lives of people from all backgrounds within the Commonwealth, and its programmes work in alliance towards eliminating avoidable blindness and to empower a new generation of young leaders. With a five-year time frame in which to deliver successful programmes, the Trust’s aim is to leave a lasting legacy, owned by the whole Commonwealth, to honour Her Majesty The Queen. For more information please visit [www.jubileetribute.org](http://www.jubileetribute.org).

**About The Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust’s Avoidable Blindness Programme:**

Eighty percent of all blindness is avoidable. Within the Commonwealth, there are an estimated 15 million people who are blind as a result of causes that can be prevented.

The Trust’s Avoidable Blindness Programme aims to make significant progress towards ending avoidable blindness within the Commonwealth, by building on the work of the VISION 2020 global initiative and to help achieve the goals set by the World Health Organisation’s Universal eye health: a global action plan 2014-2019.

The Programme will tackle three specific diseases and health issues linked to avoidable blindness – blinding trachoma, diabetic retinopathy and retinopathy of prematurity. An overarching Initiative developing fellowships, research and technology will additionally strengthen and make available high quality eye health care for all those who need it within the Commonwealth.

**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