

# Framework for Telemedicine use in India

January 29, 2021

**In news :** Recently, the Union Health Minister released the Framework on use of telemedicine for cancer, diabetes, heart diseases and stroke.

## **What is a Telemedicine?**

Telemedicine includes the use of communication networks and digital solutions in providing health services. It allows collaboration between providers and patients across spatial boundaries, for activities linked to health promotion, prevention, diagnosis, timely referral, management and follow-up of patients

## **What is Telehealth?**

The delivery and facilitation of health and health-related services, including medical care, provider and patient education, health information services, and self-care via telecommunications and digital communication technologies

## **Evolution of telemedicine in India**

E-health solutions, which include telemedicine, are recognized as cost-effective tools to increase access to health care and to improve patient outcomes. Telemedicine in India was started with the support of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in 2001. Multiple telemedicine projects have been initiated in different states of the country in collaboration with Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY) and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW)

## **Telemedicine guidelines by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**

MoHFW, Government of India released the 'Telemedicine Practice Guidelines' in March 2020 to give practical inputs to the doctors in realizing the full potential of the telemedicine for better healthcare delivery in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The guidelines are focussed on the Registered Medical Practitioner (RMP) defined as a person who is enrolled in the State Medical Register or the Indian Medical Register under the Indian Medical Council (IMC) Act 195

### **Rationale of use of telemedicine**

- Patients suffering from NCDs need long term care and support. Shortage of health workers and inadequate access to hospitals and medicines are essential barriers for optimizing care.
- Leveraging technologies for NCD care can have a positive impact on NCD control strategies.
- Telemedicine has a role in the whole spectrum of NCD care.
- It has a role in promoting healthy behaviours, prevention of risk factors, early detection of diseases, timely initiation of treatment, monitoring and follow-up support, rehabilitation and palliation.
- Telemedicine can increase access to healthcare and help in maintaining the continuum of care

### **Significance of Telemedicine**

- Telemedicine with its components of tele-consultation, tele-monitoring, tele-triage can be integrated to build a continuum of care model for major NCDs.
- The increasing burden of NCDs in India requires multi pronged interventions that can address promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative aspects of NCD care and management.
- Telemedicine can bridge and link all these aspects.
- It can be adapted and used by medical practitioners from

primary to tertiary health care level in India, through the national teleconsultation network and other similar platforms

- It will also encourage remote healthcare and minimize inconvenience to patients to travel to hospitals.

### **Burden of Noncommunicable diseases(NCDs) in India**

- NCDs are a major cause of disease, disability and death in India.
- The demographic and epidemiological transition has resulted in a shift in the morbidity burden from infectious diseases to NCDs.
- Ischaemic Heart Diseases and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Diseases are the top two leading causes of disease burden, stroke is the fifth cause. NCDs contributed to 55% of the Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) and 61.8% of deaths in India in 2016.
- NCDs are estimated to account for 55 million deaths by 2030.
- Management and prevention of NCDs and reduction in deaths due to NCDs is an essential component of achieving the health goals of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Managing NCDs is a challenge when the resources are limited, and when there are other competing priorities.