

Empowering Tuberculosis Survivors to become TB Champions

Delhi, August 13, 2021: A group of 19 Tuberculosis survivors from across Delhi - NCR came together to participate in a capacity-building workshop held in the city. The workshop was organised by REACH, a non-profit organisation working on tuberculosis (TB) for over two decades, in collaboration with the Delhi State TB Cell as part of the Unite to ACT (Amplifying Community Action for TB Elimination) project. The three-day workshop, which began on August 11, aimed to empower the TB Survivors with skills to become TB Champions.

Dr B K Vashishat, State TB Officer, New Delhi; Dr Ashwini Khanna, Consultant at National TB Elimination Programme, Delhi & Dr Vishal Khanna, District TB Officer, Delhi were present at the workshop. They interacted with the TB Champions from six districts of the capital. Highlighting the key responsibilities of a TB Champion, Dr Vashishat said, "Tuberculosis is not merely an infection, it has several underlying social determinants. There are TB survivors who lost their jobs; many of them could not afford to access health services as it strained their pockets, yet, they fought the disease with grit. To meet the national goal to eliminate TB by 2025, we have to stand together and fight the stigma associated with TB."

The objective of the capacity-building workshop was to enable the TB survivors to become effective TB Champions and play a critical role in supporting people with TB and sensitising communities about TB and COVID-19. Over three days, the TB Champions were oriented on the basic science of TB, the structure of the National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP), key TB issues in urban clusters, providing psychosocial support, advocacy, communications, network building and self-care.

The workshop adopted a participatory approach to provide an opportunity for the participants to open up and understand the concepts of TB and their role as TB Champions. Speaking during a special story-sharing session, Sahil, a TB survivor-turned-Champion from West Delhi said, "I was diagnosed with HIV at the age of 11. My community cast me out and I was forced to leave my residence. After several years, I was diagnosed with Multi-Drug Resistant TB, which I fought well with the care and support of many of my well-wishers. As a TB Champion, I want to keep this hope alive for every individual fighting TB and be there to help them."

Ms. Smrity Kumar, Project Lead, Unite to ACT said, "Through this project, we will empower TB Champions and mainstream community engagement across the country. The project will be implemented in ten states, including Delhi and we will strengthen TB-affected communities to effectively collaborate with the TB programme and other stakeholders to eliminate TB."

Speaking from Chennai, Dr. Ramya Ananthakrishnan, Director, REACH said, "Since 2016, we have been working with TB survivors across the country and helping them become powerful Champions. This project presents us with an opportunity to further expand this work and expand the cadre of TB Champions in India. I call on all new TB Champions to begin working in their communities and help people with TB receive the personalised care and support they need, especially during these COVID-19 times".

About REACH:

An acronym for Resource Group for Education and Advocacy for Community Health, REACH was established in 1999 in response to the rolling out of the Revised National TB Control Program (RNTCP) in Tamil Nadu. REACH is currently implementing the Unite to ACT project as a sub-recipient to FIND. Delhi is a priority state for the project.

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