

Standing Committee Report Summary

Implementation of Schemes for the Welfare of Senior Citizens

- The Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment (Chairperson: Mr Hemanand Biswal) submitted its report on the implementation of schemes for the welfare of senior citizens on February 7, 2014.
- Between 2000 and 2050, the population of India will grow by 55%. However, the population above 60 years and 80 years will grow by 326% and 700% respectively. The Committee has made recommendations regarding the welfare of senior citizens, especially given the projected shift in demographic patterns.
- **Implementation of existing policies:** Several schemes for senior citizens were formulated under the 12th Plan. These include: (a) a scheme for awareness generation for the Maintenance of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, (b) setting up a helpline for senior citizens, (c) establishing a National Commission for Senior Citizens, and (d) establishing a National Trust for the Aged.
- The Committee recommended expediting the implementation of these schemes, which are pending even two years after the start of the 12th Plan. Additionally, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE) should be strengthened to coordinate better between different ministries implementing schemes for senior citizens more effectively.
- **New policies and laws:** The Committee recommended the following new policies and laws:
 - (i) A comprehensive law for the social security of senior citizens must be enacted.
 - (ii) An integrated action plan must be evolved involving various stakeholders and departments of the government.
 - (iii) A new National Policy on Older Persons must be formulated. While a National Policy on Older Persons was launched in 1999, it has not been implemented effectively. A draft National Policy on Senior Citizens was published in 2011 but has not been finalised and implemented either.
- (iv) An expert committee must be constituted to formulate specialised health care policies for the population above 80 years.
- (v) The Department of Disability Affairs in the MoSJE should be renamed Department of Disability Affairs and Senior Citizens. It should work towards implementing schemes for senior citizens.
- **National Council for Senior Citizens:** The National Council for Senior Citizens, constituted in 2012, must be functionalised at the earliest. State level councils must also be established.
- **Expansion of old age homes and geriatric healthcare:** The Committee recommended that more old age homes be constructed, to ensure an old age home in every district.
- **Norms and guidelines for old age homes:** Standardised norms and guidelines must be formulated for old age homes, especially related to design of buildings and expertise required to manage these homes.
- **Pension, health insurance and tax exemptions:** People below the poverty line (BPL) over 60 are given a pension of Rs 200 per months and those over 80 are given a pension of Rs 500 under the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme. The Committee recommended that pension be increased to a minimum of Rs 1,000 per month and that it be made available to those above the poverty line as well.
- A health insurance scheme must be formulated for senior citizens. Alternatively, the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana, which provides health insurance to BPL families, must be universalised.
- The Ministry of Finance provides tax exemptions up to Rs 2.5 lakh and Rs 5 lakh per year for people above 60 years and 80 years respectively. The Committee recommended that the exemption should be raised periodically.

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