

Covid-19 Activities and community outreach by Samarthyam

CORONA VIRUS (COVID-19) Outbreak

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and the countrywide lockdown, various state affiliates of Samarthyam are providing social protection to the people with disabilities and senior citizens in particular and the poor and marginalized at large in the current COVID19 crisis

The Covid-19 crisis is new.

It is requiring us all to act, interact and communicate so that we get social justice and equality of opportunities. It is time that we **include persons with disabilities as co-creators of Covid-19 responses, as champions and users, not as victims.**

Samarthyam team is working with proactive approach to reach out to grassroots disabled people organizations (DPOs) with the help of **central and state governments** and **UN agencies**. As India continues to battle the pandemic, Samarthyam is extending support to **people with disabilities** to reassure that their survival is a priority by promoting outreach in rural and remote areas, assuring information in accessible formats and preventing discrimination.

What is the scale of the problem?

India is home to nearly 150 million people with some degree of disability. Nearly 25-30 million have severe disability. Most of them live as part of their families and depend on a carer. This adds to another 25-30 million carers. So we are looking at nearly **50 million people who need special support, which was not routinely forthcoming.**

What are the unique challenges that people with disability face?

People with disability have special issues in a situation like the spread of the **novel corona virus (SARS-CoV-2)**. People with disability are a diverse group, experiencing different hardships in accessing information on prevention and risk of infection. People with visual impairment and blindness depend upon touch for most of their daily activities. They need to hold the hand of an escort to move around; they cannot read the messages that the rest of the population can see; they cannot practice social distancing unless there are innovative

approaches like keeping a safe distance using a white cane. For the hearing impaired, especially those who are not literate, they cannot hear the message or read it. Since many depend on lip-reading, they are compromised when the person giving a message is wearing a mask.

None of the messages in the media is using sign language interpreters. The people with physical disabilities cannot reach a wash basin or may not be able to wash their hands vigorously. Children and adolescents with conditions like cerebral palsy or Down's Syndrome need to be assisted in feeding. People with mental health issues cannot comprehend the messages. At the same time, people with disabilities have a higher risk of conditions such as diabetes and hypertension which are high-risk factors for Covid-19 mortality. Therefore people with disabilities need much more support than the rest of the population in the face of a pandemic.

Activities undertaken by Samarthyam for people with disabilities (PwDs) to mitigate the Covid- 19 outbreak in India

1. Anjlee Agarwal, Member, NITI Aayog- CSO-Standing Committee, Co-founder and Executive Director, Samarthyam has created the 'Covid-19 Action Collaborative of Disabled People Organisations and Govt.'
2. Samarthyam is actively working with network of 31 Secretaries of Social Welfare Departments, 25 Secretaries/State Disability Commissioners, government officers and 340 Disabled People Organisations (DPOs) covering 29 states and 7 Union Territories in India. This network is created with support of Secretary, Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment. Govt. of India. This Collaborative support stakeholder to coordinate and integrate the Covid-19 response.
3. On 23 March, when the 21 days lock down was announced, we started working with the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Government of India to ensure there are Comprehensive Disability Inclusive Guidelines ¹ for PwDs. On March 31, 2020 detailed guidelines were issued for PwDs for issuing e-passes for NGOs working for PwDs and their caregivers. Many states have since followed suit and issued detailed orders to the civil administration to issue such passes in areas of their jurisdiction. As a

¹ Comprehensive Disability Inclusive Guidelines to States/UTs for protection and safety of Persons with Disabilities in light of COVID-19- <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1608495>

result of this, instructions are also sent to law enforcement authorities in the states/UTs to take immediate steps to issue e- passes to the caregivers/ maids of PwDs, provide food supply, funds (cash) and health kits on request of PwDs.

4. What finally made a difference was active advocacy by Samarthyam to send a letter through Mrs. Shakuntala D. Gamlin, Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities in all states to State Disability Commissioners/Secretary, Social Welfare Department on March 31, about the necessity to implement the guidelines for protection and safety of PwDs and issuance of e-pass for their care givers (<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1608495>). Most states almost immediately implemented the guidelines and issued further directions to their civil administrations. Other states followed three or four days later.
5. In Delhi, on April 4, the Delhi State Commissioner for PwDs, Mr. Ramesh Negi, issued directions to the e-pass issuing authority and data entry operators in Delhi to consider “Caregiver for PwDs” as an essential service while processing the applications for e-passes and to issue such passes within 24 hours of application. The link is - <https://epass.jantasamvad.org/epass/init/>. On April 7, the Delhi government notified an e-pass for caregivers in the exempted category list.
6. In some states, the insistence by officials on photocopies of Aadhaar, identity proofs and disability certificates have posed a problem as these facilities are closed. So, efforts are now being made to have states accept soft copies of these documents for making of e-passes.
7. Similarly. District Magistrates and Social Welfare Officers in all states are requested through govt. orders/ letters to ensure that PwDs have access to essential support services (even for their daily living activities like caregiver support), ration supplies and medical aid at their doorstep.
8. SHGs run by PwDs are given the work of preparing masks so that they get daily wages and paucity of masks at local level can be mitigated. Good example- SHGs under DPOs from Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and MP have started preparing and providing to State Govt. and their surrounding villages. Approx. 40,000 masks per day are prepared by PwDs and sent for distribution in these 3 states.

9. Samarthyam is maintaining all government orders/ letters issued by state and central government on webpage especially created on Covid-19 and this is promoted in all government and non-government what's app groups and social media. The link to the webpage is <https://samarthyam.com/coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak.html>
10. To reach out to poorest of the poor and marginalized PwDs with severe disability, local DPOs are being trained through mobile on self protection and care to be taken with easy to do things to prevent pandemic break out in rural areas.
11. Samarthyam team is also working with govt. and service providers to ensure doorstep delivery of food and medicines through network of online- what's app group in Delhi NCR and will follow up in remote and rural areas of Delhi also.

12. Outreach during Covid-19 lockdown (29/4/2020)-

- 147 people with disabilities and super senior citizens in India got e-passes for their care givers
- 288 people with disabilities were connected with medicine suppliers
- More than 800 people with disabilities got dry ration delivered to their door steps
- In East Delhi, a man with spinal injury (quadriplegic) was supported by providing access to ambulance service to weekly visit hospital during lock down for dressing of infections on his wounds due to hip surgery. He was provided door step delivery of medicines, ration and funds to hire ambulance every week.
- IN Kuki village (tribal area) in Manipur, a group of PwDs were connected through What's App group of State Commissioner to deliver ration at door step as there was no vehicle reaching out to the hillock village. State Commissioner, Manipur is also requested to provide supply every week.
- Two young adults, one with Autism and another with multiple disabilities were provided conveyance to reach out to their families. Inter-state movement passes in three states, police permission and co-ordination with Ministry was undertaken for their safe movement.
- In Delhi and Lucknow, three women with disabilities having disabled family members were provided with funds and ration. They are further connected with local police station and NGOs to get regular food and medicine supplies.