REPORT

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
SUSTAINABLE PROVISION
OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY
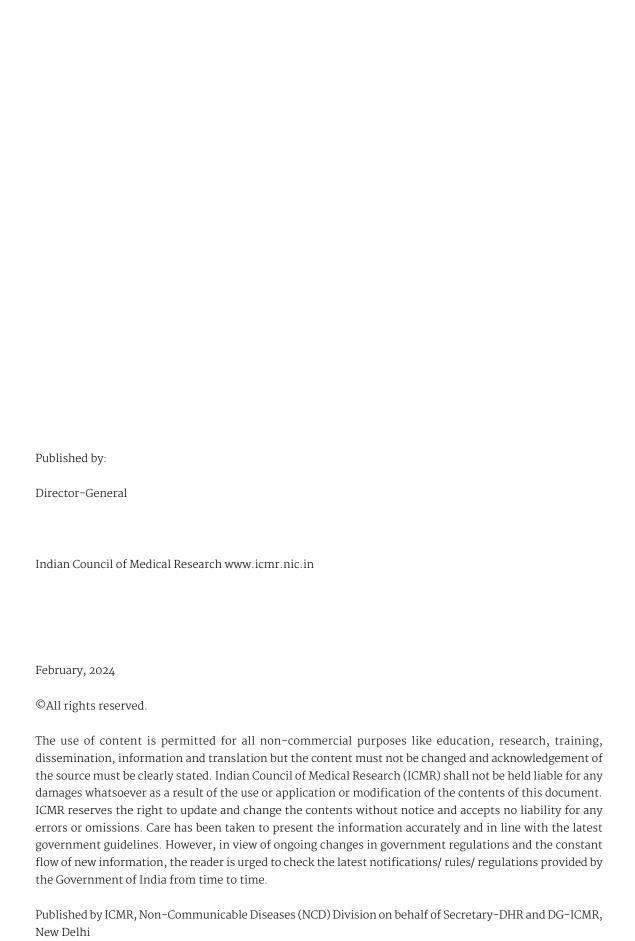# (NCONSPAT-23) - LOOKING BEYOND NLEAP…

1st - 2nd NOVEMBER, 2023
CONFERENCE HALL, ICMR HEADQUARTERS, NEW DELHI

ORGANISED BY:
INDIAN COUNCIL OF MEDICAL RESEARCH (ICMR)
THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS (ICRC)

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BACKGROUND

Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) launched the Prioritized National List of Essential Assistive Products (NLEAP) in September 2023 after extensive consultations with diverse groups of stakeholders. The stakeholders had suggested that a roadmap for further course of action may be charted out for successful implementation of NLEAP. ICMR was approached by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), who was one of the stakeholders, to organize a **"National Conference on Sustainable Provision of Assistive Technology (NConSPAT-23) – Looking beyond NLEAP…"** to outline the deliverables for enhancing access to assistive technologies. The Conference was held on November 1-2, 2023 at Conference Hall, ICMR Headquarters, New Delhi.

This Conference aimed to unite key stakeholders from the health and rehabilitation sectors in India, with the primary objective of strengthening the consistent provision of secure, effective, affordable, and high-quality assistive products. The ultimate goal is to achieve universal access to assistive technology for individuals with functional impairments throughout the nation.

The conference agenda comprised **8-panel discussions** categorized into **four thematic domains**: Disability, Rehabilitation, Assistive Technology, and Accessibility. The focus was on **five interconnected aspects** of assistive technology, encompassing People, Products, Provision, Personnel, and Policy. Each domain included actionable initiatives and specific questions for panelists to address during the sessions. These questions covered the current status, objectives, existing gaps, strategies, to bridge those gaps, and short--, mid-, and long-term solutions and actions needed. *(Where are we now? Where are we targeting to be? What are the gaps? How to get there? What are the short-, mid-, and long-term solutions/required actions?).*

People: All stakeholders are encouraged to actively involve users and their families in action plan development and evaluation, educate the public on assistive technology, raise awareness of its benefits, and empower users and their families in policy development and provision. Additionally, they should support the creation of enabling environments through active engagement.

Products: Collaboration among designers, engineers, manufacturers, academic institutions, governments, users and their families, professional associations, service providers, and investors is crucial. This collaboration can encompass various activities, including the development of essential assistive product lists, assessments of local manufacturing capacity, the establishment and updating of safety and efficacy standards, promotion of innovation and design, consideration of user preferences, ensuring digital compatibility, and implementation of quality assurance mechanisms.

Provision: In this domain, multiple stakeholders must work together to enhance coordination and referral networks across sectors, establish quality standards, improve procurement mechanisms, ensure accessibility and affordability of assistive technology, invest in emerging technologies, offer comprehensive services, involve peer-users in training, promote the refurbishment of reusable products, and establish information systems for coordination and user support.

Personnel: Stakeholders should identify the necessary competencies and skills for personnel at various levels involved in assistive technology, develop capacity-building strategies, adopt training standards, provide continuous training and education, expand the assistive technology workforce, and consider task-shifting when appropriate to broaden access.

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Policy: Policymaking is a collective responsibility involving multiple government ministries and agencies. Key actions include designating coordinating bodies, conducting regular data collection and situational analysis, creating national strategies and action plans, involving stakeholders in decision-making, establishing regulatory systems, implementing sustainable financing mechanisms, strengthening data collection systems, and promoting international collaboration in research and innovation.

This conference represented a vital step towards ensuring equitable access to assistive technology for individuals with functional impairments in India, aligning with international commitments and best practices in the field. It brought together diverse stakeholders to address the comprehensive range of challenges and opportunities in the realm of assistive technology.

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OBJECTIVES

This conference aimed to bring the national stakeholders from the health and rehabilitation sectors together to strengthen the sustained provision of safe, effective, affordable and quality assistive products to achieve universal access to assistive technology for those with functional impairments in India.

The conference also intended to create platforms for exchanging knowledge, experience, practices, and lessons learned among different stakeholders. These exchanges identified synergies and foster collaborative thinking towards co-created meaningful, relevant and actionable recommendations that are owned by India and its stakeholders. Every country has its context to be considered to plan and develop the best path to improve access to assistive technology.

At the end of the conference, sets of action plans (*White Paper*) would be identified and listed collectively to operationalize the recommendations ensuring their adaptation to the context of the country and undertaking feasible ways to progressively achieve universal access to assistive technology in the country.

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EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The National Conference on Sustainable Provision of Assistive Technology (NConSPAT-23) had ambitious objectives aimed at making a meaningful impact on the provision of assistive technology in India. The expected outcomes of the conference were:

- **Enhanced Collaboration:** Fostered collaboration and knowledge-sharing among national stakeholders in the health and rehabilitation sectors. Encouraged partnerships between professionals, policymakers, academic institutions, organizations representing people with disabilities or older individuals, non-profit organizations, and more.

- **Strengthened Provision:** Strengthened the sustainable provision of assistive products in India. This included ensuring the availability of safe, effective, affordable, and high-quality assistive technology for individuals with functional impairments.

- **Universal Access:** Advanced the goal of achieving universal access to assistive technology in India. By bringing together diverse stakeholders, the conference aimed to identify strategies and actions to make assistive products accessible to all who need them.

- **Knowledge Exchange:** Facilitated the exchange of knowledge, experiences, best practices, and lessons learned among different stakeholders. This knowledge sharing helped identify synergies and collaborative opportunities.

- **Co-Creation of Recommendations:** Encouraged collaborative thinking towards co-creating meaningful, relevant, and actionable recommendations. These recommendations will be tailored to India's unique context and will address the specific challenges and opportunities in the country.

- **Action Plans (White Paper):** After the conference, sets of action plans, often referred to as a White Paper, would be identified and listed. These action plans would operationalize the recommendations generated during the conference, outlining feasible steps to progressively achieve universal access to assistive technology in India.

- **Ownership and Commitment:** Promoted a sense of ownership among Indian stakeholders regarding the recommendations and action plans. Encouraged commitment to their implementation to ensure long-term impact.

METHODOLOGY

An Organizing Committee was constituted with members from ICMR and ICRC. During preparatory meetings, it was agreed that NConSPAT may be structured based on deliverables of UNICEF-WHO Global Report on Assistive Technology (GReAT) and assistive products listed in the NLEAP. The NConSPAT-23 was organized over 2 days, in the form of 8 panels of experts, wherein titles of the panels were selected from 10 recommendations of GReAT Report. The discussions were categorized into **four thematic domains:** Disability, Rehabilitation, Assistive Technology, and Accessibility. The focus was on **five interconnected aspects** of assistive technology, encompassing People, Products, Provision, Personnel, and Policy. Each domain included actionable initiatives and specific questions for panelists to address during the sessions. These questions covered the current status, objectives, existing gaps, strategies, to bridge those gaps, and short--, mid-, and long-term solutions and actions needed. *(Where are we now? Where are we targeting to be? What are the gaps? How to get there? What are the short-, mid-, and long-term solutions/required actions?).*

Participants & the target audience were Professionals from the health and rehabilitation sectors, Policy makers, Academic institutions, Organizations representing people with disabilities or older people, Non-profit organizations, Professional associations, User representatives, Manufacturers, Funding agencies and donors, Allied private entities, Administrators, Standardization experts, and Humanitarian organizations.

The **six steps approach** involved in organizing this conference was:

(Step 1) Defining Conference Objectives: The initial step involved a comprehensive articulation of the NConSPAT-23 objectives, clearly outlining the main objectives and aligning them with the key recommendations of the GReAT Report & outlining the purpose, participants & target audience, and expected outcomes of the conference.

(Step 2) Organizing Panel Discussions: Several meetings were held on structuring the conference into 8 panels of experts, corresponding to the 10 key recommendations from the GReAT Report (last four recommendations were merged into two panels). The experts for each panel were selected as per approach used for selecting different stakeholders in developing the prioritized NLEAP. This approach ensured a diverse range of perspectives by the experts. Each panel was assigned a moderator to smoothly run the deliberations.

(Step 3) Pre-Conference Communication: All the panel experts were briefed through emails regarding aims, objectives, way forward & recommendations, and the identified questions related to their respective panels. It helped us to get their opinions on each of the panel themes. The idea behind it was to use panelists' responses to tailor discussions to the conference's needs and expectations.

(Step 4) Panel Discussion Structure: On the day of the conference, each panel started with a brief presentation summarizing the corresponding panel aims, objectives, way forward & recommendations and the identified questions. Open discussions were facilitated by the moderators. The moderator asked each panelist to share insights, challenges, and potential solutions related to their respective panel question/theme.

(Step 5) Q&A Sessions: After each panel discussion, a dedicated Q&A session was included to allow the target audience to seek clarification, share additional insights, and interact with panelists.

(Step 6) Post-Conference Action Plan: The conference concluded with a session dedicated to formulating an action plan. The detailed action plan would be used to prepare a White Paper on the status of AT and proposed actions to improve the access to AT. The White Paper would provide background of the work done across different parts of the globe including India, need for ATs, proposed actions & practical solutions, resources required for provisioning, expected impact on the society & individuals, and future directions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

PANEL I:
STRENGTHENING REHABILITATION IN HEALTH SYSTEMS

Aim: To explore strategies for strengthening rehabilitation in health systems and its role in improving access to assistive technology.

Objectives:
1. Discuss the integration of rehabilitation services within healthcare systems.
2. Highlight the importance of collaboration between the health and rehabilitation sectors.
3. Identify challenges and opportunities for enhancing rehabilitation services in India.
4. Share best practices for promoting universal access to assistive technology through rehabilitation.

Pillars:
1. **Develop standardized protocols:** Create standardized protocols for the integration of rehabilitation services within healthcare systems. These protocols should outline the roles and responsibilities of healthcare providers and rehabilitation specialists.
2. **Training and capacity building:** Invest in training and capacity building programs to equip healthcare professionals with the knowledge and skills required to deliver rehabilitation services effectively.
3. **Collaboration framework:** Establish a collaboration framework between health and rehabilitation sectors, encouraging regular communication and joint initiatives to improve access to assistive technology.
4. **Research and data collection:** Promote research on the effectiveness of rehabilitation services in enhancing access to assistive technology. Collect and analyze data to monitor progress and identify areas for improvement.

Members:
- Dr Rajinder K Dhamija (Chairperson)
- Dr Avijit Bansal (Moderator)
- Dr Ravinder Singh
- Dr Suman Badhal
- Dr Gita Handa
- Dr Ruchi Varshney
- Mr Gopal Pandian

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Key recommendations from the panel discussion

1. **Sensitize and Train Healthcare Providers:** Enhancing the understanding of assistive technology (AT) among healthcare providers is crucial for empowering individuals with functional impairments. This involves developing modules for professional education curricula and specialized training programs for medical and allied health professionals, ensuring they comprehend the role of AT and can effectively counsel patients.

2. **Encourage Appropriate Counseling and Referrals:** Fostering a culture of counselling and referrals within healthcare practices is vital. Collaborating with institutions like the National Medical Commission (NMC) and medical professional bodies will encourage healthcare providers to undergo necessary training and subsequently counsel patients on the benefits of AT.

3. **Establish AT Facilitation Touch-Points:** Integrating AT into existing health systems requires the creation of dedicated touchpoints for evaluation, counselling, and access. These AT hubs, strategically located within hospitals or departments, will be manned by trained personnel, including physiatrists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, prosthetists, orthotists, audiologists, and optometrists. Model workflows will be developed, piloted, refined, and published to ensure seamless integration.

4. **Empower Users with Choice and Control:** Facilitating user autonomy in choosing and managing AT involves raising awareness, providing training, and restructuring reimbursement systems. Efforts will be made to disseminate user-friendly educational materials through various media, advocate for insurance reimbursement through a joint statement, and establish a closed-loop feedback system to enhance product and service quality while continuously collecting relevant data for policymakers. This ensures a shift away from one-size-fits-all approaches to a more individualized, empowering model.

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PANEL II:
IMPROVE ACCESS TO ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY WITHIN ALL KEY DEVELOPMENT SECTORS

Aim: To discuss ways to improve access to assistive technology within all key development sectors.

Objectives:

1. Examine the role of various development sectors in facilitating access to assistive technology.
2. Explore strategies for mainstreaming assistive technology across different sectors.
3. Identify barriers to access and discuss potential solutions.
4. Share success stories of organizations promoting assistive technology in development sectors..

Pillars:

1. **Sector-specific strategies:** Develop sector-specific strategies for mainstreaming assistive technology. Engage key stakeholders from various sectors to tailor solutions to their unique challenges and needs.
2. **Cross-sector coordination:** Establish a coordinating body or committee that brings together representatives from different development sectors to facilitate collaboration and information sharing.
3. **Accessible funding mechanisms:** Create funding mechanisms that prioritize projects and initiatives related to assistive technology in development sectors.
4. **Public-private partnerships:** Encourage public-private partnerships to leverage resources and expertise for the implementation of assistive technology initiatives in development sectors.

Members:

- Dr Gowri Nambiar Sengupta (Chairperson)
- Dr Geeta Rani (Moderator)
- Dr Jitender Sharma
- Dr Madan Gopal
- Dr Hemlata
- Ms Albina Shankar
- Mr Hunny

Key recommendations from the panel discussion

1. **Sector-specific strategies:** To enhance the adoption and efficacy of assistive technologies within the sector, it is imperative to implement a multifaceted approach. Firstly, comprehensive awareness campaigns should be designed, targeting government officials, NGOs, healthcare professionals, and the general public. This can be achieved through the creation of an online platform or portal dedicated to disseminating information about the benefits and availability of assistive technologies. Secondly, a robust regulatory framework must be established, encompassing clear and comprehensive guidelines for the development, procurement, and use of assistive technology to ensure both quality and safety. To enforce these guidelines, regular audits and evaluations should be implemented, fostering strict adherence and accountability across the sector.

2. **Cross-sector coordination:** To foster effective cross-sector coordination in the realm of assistive technology, a multifaceted strategy is recommended. Firstly, specialized training programs should be instituted for healthcare providers, teachers, and rehabilitation professionals, coupled with the establishment of certification programs to recognize and promote expertise in assistive technology. Facilitating knowledge exchange is pivotal; thus, a collaborative platform for sharing best practices and regular conferences, workshops, and webinars should be implemented. Comprehensive training programs for users, families, and caregivers, along with a repository of accessible training materials, are essential for maximizing the utilization of assistive technology.

Standardization efforts should be prioritized, promoting compatibility and interoperability through the endorsement of industry standards and the establishment of a certification process. Finally, substantial investments in the development of a robust infrastructure for assistive technology services, including well-equipped rehabilitation centres, clinics, and training facilities staffed with skilled professionals, are crucial to ensuring widespread accessibility and efficacy.

3. **Accessible funding mechanisms:** To invigorate the assistive technology sector, a strategic approach is proposed. Firstly, ongoing market analysis should be conducted to pinpoint gaps and opportunities, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship through incentives for startups and companies. Secondly, the promotion of assistive technology rental programs is crucial to provide cost-effective solutions for those unable to afford purchasing equipment, and collaboration with insurance providers to include assistive technology rentals in coverage plans is recommended. This dual-pronged strategy aims to ensure affordability, accessibility and sustained growth in the assistive technology market.

4. **Public-private partnerships:** To advance the integration of assistive technology, a dual-pronged strategy is proposed. Firstly, collaboration with corporations is recommended to sensitize them about the significance of including assistive technology projects in their corporate social responsibility initiatives. To incentivize business involvement, offering tax incentives or other benefits is advised. Secondly, adopting a user-inclusive approach is vital, emphasizing the involvement of individuals with disabilities in the design, testing, and improvement of assistive technology solutions to ensure alignment with user needs. The establishment of feedback mechanisms is encouraged to foster continuous refinement and adaptation of technologies, promoting user-centred and impactful outcomes.

PANEL III:
ENSURE THAT ASSISTIVE PRODUCTS ARE SAFE, EFFECTIVE AND AFFORDABLE

Aim: To explore measures to ensure that assistive products are safe, effective, and affordable.

Objectives:
1. Discuss the importance of safety and affordability in assistive products.
2. Examine quality standards and regulations for assistive technology.
3. Explore strategies for making assistive products more cost-effective.
4. Share insights from organizations ensuring the safety and affordability of assistive technology.

Pillars:
1. **Quality standards enhancement:** Strengthen and update quality standards and regulations for assistive technology, ensuring products are safe, effective, and affordable.
2. **Price regulation:** Implement price regulation mechanisms or incentives to make assistive products more affordable without compromising quality.
3. **Local manufacturing support:** Support local manufacturing of assistive products by providing incentives, technical assistance, and capacity-building to manufacturers.
4. **Public awareness campaigns:** Launch public awareness campaigns to educate consumers about the importance of using safe and effective assistive products

Members:
- Dr A K Yadav (Chairperson)
- Dr Neha Dahiya (Moderator)
- Mr P J Singh
- Dr Prasanth Vinjamuri
- Dr Sujata Srinivasan
- Mr Siddarth Daga

Key recommendations from the panel discussion
1. **To Establish Rigorous Quality Control Measures and Engage Industry and Users in Setting Clear Standards:** In the context of ensuring the safety and affordability of assistive products, establishing rigorous quality control measures is essential. This involves engaging industry experts, users, and regulatory bodies to collaboratively set clear standards. This ensures that products meet safety requirements while maintaining affordability. Quality control measures should encompass thorough testing, certification processes, and ongoing monitoring to guarantee the safety and effectiveness of assistive products.

2. **To Encourage Industry Collaboration to Continually Develop and Maintain Product Specifications:** Industry collaboration is crucial in the development and maintenance of product specifications for assistive technology. This involves fostering an environment where manufacturers, designers, and engineers work collectively to enhance product features and functionalities. Continuous collaboration ensures that evolving needs and technological advancements are considered, contributing to the creation of innovative, safe, and affordable assistive products.

3. **To Implement Price Controls and Incentivize Mass Production to Ensure Accessibility and Affordability:** To address the affordability aspect, implementing price controls and incentivizing mass production are key strategies. This involves regulatory mechanisms or financial incentives for manufacturers to produce assistive products at scale, reducing production costs. By doing so, the aim is to make these products more accessible and affordable for a broader range of users without compromising quality standards.

4. **To Engage in External Validation and Certification Processes to Ensure Safety and Quality:** External validation and certification processes play a pivotal role in ensuring the safety and quality of assistive products. Collaborating with independent certifying bodies and regulatory authorities helps verify that products adhere to established standards. This not only builds user trust but also ensures that safety considerations are met, contributing to the overall effectiveness of assistive technology.

5. **To Foster Collaboration and Promote Technology Transfer Between Academia and Industry for Research and Development:** Collaboration between academia and industry is crucial for advancing research and development in assistive technology. This involves knowledge transfer, joint research initiatives, and sharing expertise to enhance product innovation. By fostering such collaboration, new technologies can be introduced, leading to safer, more effective, and cost-efficient assistive products.

6. **To Collaborate with Local Manufacturers to Reduce Production Costs and Ensure a Stable Supply of Raw Materials:** Collaborating with local manufacturers is instrumental in reducing production costs for assistive products. This can be achieved by providing incentives, technical assistance, and capacity-building. Additionally, ensuring a stable supply of raw materials through strategic collaborations contributes to maintaining the affordability and accessibility of assistive technology.

7. **To Facilitate the Transfer of Research Findings to Practical Applications:** Facilitating the transfer of research findings to practical applications involves translating academic research into tangible products. This ensures that the latest innovations and safety considerations identified through research are integrated into the development of assistive products, contributing to their safety and effectiveness.

8. **To Engage Industry Stakeholders and End-Users in the Development of Product Standards:** Involving industry stakeholders and end-users in the development of product standards ensures that the perspectives of both the manufacturing sector and the ultimate users are considered. This collaborative approach helps in setting standards that are not only rigorous but also align with the practical needs and expectations of the end-users, promoting the safety and affordability of assistive products.

9. **To Conduct Public Awareness Campaigns and Increase Visibility for Products:** Public awareness campaigns are essential to educate consumers about the importance of using safe and effective assistive products. By increasing visibility, these campaigns not only inform potential users about available solutions but also create a demand that encourages manufacturers to prioritize safety and affordability in their product development processes.

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PANEL IV:
ENLARGE, DIVERSIFY AND IMPROVE HUMAN RESOURCE CAPACITY

Aim: To discuss how to enlarge, diversify, and improve human resource capacity in the field of assistive technology.

Objectives:

1. Identify the skills and competencies required in the assistive technology workforce.
2. Discuss strategies for capacity building and training programs.
3. Explore the role of different stakeholders in expanding human resource capacity.
4. Share examples of successful initiatives in this domain.

Pillars:

1. **Competency frameworks:** Develop competency frameworks outlining the skills and qualifications required for different roles within the assistive technology workforce.
2. **Training programs:** Establish training programs that cater to the specific needs of different personnel levels, from basic training for community workers to advanced training for specialists.
3. **Task-shifting strategies:** Explore the potential for task-shifting within the assistive technology workforce to ensure broader access while maintaining quality standards.
4. **Certification and accreditation:** Create certification and accreditation mechanisms for assistive technology professionals to ensure the highest quality of care.

Members:

- Dr R K Srivastava (Chairperson)
- Dr Salaj Rana (Moderator)
- Dr Rajendra P. Gupta
- Mr Rajeev Sharma
- Ms A. Srija
- Dr Sanjiv K Jha
- Mr Rajesh Tiwari

Key recommendations from the panel discussion

1. **To Establish a Consortium for Training Module Development:** Create a collaborative consortium or system involving key stakeholders, including government agencies, non-profit organizations, and academic institutions, to develop comprehensive training modules in the field of assistive technology. These modules should cover a wide range of topics, from basic concepts to advanced applications, to ensure a well-rounded workforce.

   This consortium will bring together experts to design standardized, evidence-based training materials, fostering consistency and quality across various training programs. These modules should address the identified skills and competencies required in the assistive technology workforce, making it easier for institutions and individuals to access relevant resources.

2. **To Prioritize Capacity Building Among Stakeholders:** Emphasize capacity-building initiatives targeting a diverse range of stakeholders involved in assistive technology, including healthcare professionals, educators, rehabilitation specialists, and community workers. These programs should aim to enhance their knowledge and understanding of assistive technology's role in improving the lives of individuals with disabilities.

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Capacity-building efforts should cater to the unique needs and responsibilities of each stakeholder group. For instance, healthcare professionals may need training on identifying and recommending assistive technologies, while educators may require guidance on integrating these tools into the classroom. These programs will foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for assistive technology implementation.

3. **To Establish a Digital Platform for Task-Shifting Discussions:** Develop a digital platform or online forum where stakeholders can engage in discussions and share insights regarding task-shifting strategies within the assistive technology workforce. This platform should facilitate the exchange of ideas, best practices, and case studies related to leveraging various professionals and community members to expand access to assistive technology services.

   The digital platform will serve as a knowledge-sharing hub, promoting collaboration and innovation. It can host discussions on successful task-shifting initiatives, potential challenges, and ways to maintain high-quality care while broadening access. This platform will enable a global community to collectively address workforce challenges and share solutions.

4. **To Establish Certification and Accreditation Mechanisms:** Establish a system for certifying and accrediting assistive technology professionals to ensure the highest quality of care. This system should encompass different levels of certification, reflecting various roles within the assistive technology workforce. These certifications will be based on established competency frameworks.

   The certification and accreditation process should involve rigorous assessments of an individual's knowledge and skills. Accredited professionals should adhere to established standards, assuring individuals with disabilities, their families, and healthcare providers that they are receiving services from competent and qualified practitioners. This mechanism will also contribute to the professionalization of the field.

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PANEL V:
ACTIVELY INVOLVE USERS OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY AND THEIR FAMILIES

Aim: To explore ways to actively involve users of assistive technology and their families in the development and evaluation of assistive products.

Objectives:
1. Discuss the importance of user involvement in the assistive technology process.
2. Share the experiences of users and their families in shaping assistive products.
3. Identify challenges and opportunities for meaningful user engagement.
4. Highlight the impact of user involvement on product development.

Pillars:
1. **User involvement guidelines:** Develop guidelines and best practices for actively involving users and their families in the design, evaluation, and improvement of assistive products.
2. **User feedback channels:** Establish feedback channels and platforms to gather continuous input from users, ensuring that their needs and preferences inform product development.
3. **User training programs:** Design training programs for users and their families to maximize the benefits of assistive technology and improve their engagement in the process.
4. **Recognition and incentives:** Recognize and incentivize user involvement through awards, acknowledgements, or other forms of recognition.

Members:
- Mr. Justin Jesudas (Chairperson)
- Mr. Navid Dadbin (Moderator)
- Mr Ankit Jindal
- Mr Arman Ali
- Mr Santosh
- Ms Madhavi
- Dr N S Senthil

Key recommendations from the panel discussion
1. **To develop user involvement guidelines:** Develop a range of criteria and guidelines for actively involving users and their families in the design, evaluation and feedback processes of assistive products. The guidelines should consider users as the primary information source as an effective means of requirement capture. The guidelines should ensure that the roles of users are agreed upon collectively, appropriate budget is considered and effective communication with the users throughout a process is sustained.

   A range of stakeholders encompassing government agencies, non-profit organizations, representatives of service users, manufacturers, service providers and academic institutions should form a focus group responsible for the development of the guidelines.

2. **To establish user feedback channels:** Create a system which contains both online and offline feedback channels for getting feedback responses from the users. The platform should ensure that user experience feedback and user satisfaction feedback are informed to manufacturers. The platform is also a tool for distributing feedback to users by the manufacturers.

Establish a focus group by involving key stakeholders including government agencies, non-profit organizations, representatives of service users, manufacturers, service providers and academic institutions. The respective working group will be responsible for developing the user feedback channels and platforms.

3. **To design user training programmes:** Create a collaborative consortium or working group involving key stakeholders, including government agencies, non-profit organizations, and academic institutions, to develop comprehensive training modules in the field of assistive technology for users. These modules should cover a wide range of topics, from basic concepts to advanced applications, to ensure a well-rounded user.

   This consortium will bring together experts to design standardized, evidence-based training materials, fostering consistency and quality across various training programs. These modules should address the identified skills and competencies required for users of assistive technology, making it easier for institutions and individuals to access relevant resources.

4. **To establish methods to recognize and incentivize user involvement:** Create a system for recognizing and incentivizing users of assistive technology to ensure the quality of assistive products. This system should encompass different methods of incentives and recognitions for motivating and rewarding the user's involvement in the production process.

   Various stakeholders including government agencies, non-profit organizations, representatives of users, service providers, manufacturers and academic institutions should form a focus group for developing and validating methods and systems for recognizing and incentivizing users of assistive technology.

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PANEL VI:
INVEST IN DATA AND EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY

Aim: To focus on increasing public awareness, garnering political support, and investing in data and evidence-based policy related to assistive technology.

Objectives:
1. Explore strategies for raising public awareness about assistive technology.
2. Discuss the role of policymakers in supporting assistive technology initiatives.
3. Highlight the importance of data and evidence in policy making.
4. Share examples of successful awareness campaigns and evidence-based policies.

Pillars:
1. **Awareness campaign framework:** Develop the strategic framework to shift the market into simplified and effective engagement of different stakeholders to create specific content for assistive technology.
2. **Advocacy policy framework:** Develop the policy framework that caters to the specific needs of developing the policy to cater to the needs of the ATs sector.
3. **Strategies for political support, data collection, and analysis:** Explore the potential for task-shifting within the assistive technology workforce to ensure broader access while maintaining quality standards.
4. **Assistive technology manufacturers:** To sustain innovators and start-ups by enabling adequate funds in the sector of ATs.

Members:
- Dr Chapal Khasnabis (Chairperson)
- Mr Ranjani Bhushan (Moderator)
- Dr Imtiaz Ahmad
- Dr Sandeep Singh
- Ms Meera Shenoy
- Dr Md Asheel
- Mr Siddarth Daga

Key recommendations from the panel discussion
1. **To establish a mechanism for increasing awareness among the stakeholders:** To upgrade the existing framework or develop a new mechanism by involving the relevant stakeholders such as different ministries MoHFW, MoSJE, MSME, NITI Aayog, educational institutes, non-profit organizations (DPOs and NGOs) and persons with disabilities to increase the awareness in the field of assistive technology.

   This mechanism should cover a conducting survey, enumeration, and evaluation of the program on the special needs of PwDs and the development of a workforce to ensure adequate theme-based awareness to make aware and easier for the institution and individuals to access the relevant resources.

2. **Develop a policy through advocacy groups:** Create a collaborative advocacy group involving relevant stakeholders from different government organizations, DPOs and public-private enterprises to develop strategies and policies in the field of assistive technology to emerge as a leading voice in the system. This group should aim to enhance the knowledge and understanding of ATs, to improve the lives of people with disabilities.

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This consortium will bring together the experts to write the appropriate strategies, and policies and develop the ecosystem across the various campaigns. These policies should address the needs of persons with disabilities and adequate competencies required for the provision of AT.

3. **To garner political support, investment in data, and evidence-based policy in the AT sector:** Develop a platform for the collaborative consortium of key stakeholders by mobilizing political support, enabling the investment in data and appropriate evidence-based policy in the sector of assistive technology. These initiatives will mobilize the political parties to influence the entire sector in the country.

Various stakeholders including government agencies, non-government organizations and international bodies should be involved in strategies and budget formulation across the assistive technology sector to ensure an increase in the budget and investment for developing the required infrastructures for an appropriate data collection. This enables evidence-based policies to ensure the implementation of government schemes and initiatives like the ADIP and Start-up India.

4. **Sustain innovators and startups:** Create a system for sustaining the start-ups and innovators by ensuring adequate financial investment, which enables the users to procure ATs. Incentivize the innovators and start-ups by reinforcing policies that exempt them from paying taxes. Support them to receive loans with non or low interest and include the ATs in the coverage of insurance companies.

Encourage various stakeholders including the government agencies to reimburse via Ayushman Bharat, increase the outlay for schemes like ADIP, enhance the users' centric discretionary annual funds, recommend not to give out the ATs during camps through a one-size-fits-all approach, also persuade the government to buy the AT products from the startups and innovators for improving the service provision.

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PANEL VII:
INVEST IN RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND AN ENABLING ECOSYSTEM
"DEVELOP AND INVEST IN ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS"

Aim: To focus on investment in research, innovation, enabling ecosystems, and environments for assistive technology.

Objectives:
1. Discuss the role of research and innovation in advancing assistive technology.
2. Explore strategies for creating enabling ecosystems for innovation.
3. Highlight successful examples of innovation in assistive products.
4. Discuss the importance of user-friendly environments for assistive technology.

Pillars:
1. **Research funding:** Allocate funding for research and innovation in assistive technology, with a focus on projects that address unmet needs and challenges.
2. **Incubators and innovation hubs:** Establish incubators and innovation hubs dedicated to assistive technology, providing resources and support to start-ups and innovators.
3. **User-centred design:** Promote user-centred design principles in the development of assistive products, involving users at every stage of product creation.
4. **Accessibility standards:** Develop and enforce accessibility standards for digital and physical environments to ensure they are conducive to the use of assistive technology.

Members:
- Dr Shirshendu Mukherjee (Chairperson)
- Mr Aijaz Rather (Moderator)
- Dr Sujatha Srinivasan
- Mr Piyush Chanana
- Mr Rajesh Kumar Das
- Dr Salaj Rana

Key recommendations from the panel discussion
1. **To develop accessibility standards for a user-friendly (accessible) environment:** The accessibility standards should be modified such that all environments (physical and digital) are accessible to everyone, regardless of ability. Government agencies like the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) of the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment (MoSJE) and relevant NGOs should take measures to include the identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility, shall apply to, communication technologies and systems, buildings, roads, transportation and other indoor and outdoor facilities, including schools, housing, medical facilities and workplaces.

   MoSJE shall bring together experts to conduct accessibility audits of public places like government offices, airports, railway stations, public transport carriers etc. The experts shall also audit all the government websites and all public documents and convert them into fully accessible websites and documents.

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2. **To allocate funding for research and innovation:** Insurance coverage and CSR funding of AT will help expand the demand and attract more funding. Governments and govt. entities like ALIMCO should source new AT from startups and established industries alike and use their extensive networks to ensure effective provision. The Ministry of Corporate Affairs should advise corporations to fund R&D in AT and fuel entrepreneurship.

   National policy on assistive technology is needed to address the issue of lack of funding for research, support innovation, and mainstream AT services within the health system at all levels. Hence, a clear leadership initiative from ministries of finance, social welfare, health, and science and technology is required at the national and sub-national levels to coordinate activities as far as research and innovation in AT is concerned.

3. **To establish incubators and innovation hubs:** An innovation hub should provide end-to-end support to startups until they are ready to sell their products. Innovation hubs and government agencies can connect startups to all stakeholders involved – clinicians, users, caregivers, research and academic institutions, manufacturers and investors.

   Innovation hubs and government agencies should create an ecosystem of innovation & entrepreneurship in AT in universities, research institutions, and private and MSME sectors. This could include startups working on mobility aids, communication devices, sensory enhancements, or any other assistive technology solutions.

4. **To develop collaboration between the academic and the research institutions:** The academic and research institutions have access to grants that can help develop the necessary ecosystem for AT development, including testing facilities, but minute gaps are still palpable. The Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Health should have regular exchanges of faculty, students, research scholars, etc. to share knowledge and technical know-how.

   This inter-ministerial collaboration can bring together professionals from diverse backgrounds, such as engineers, designers, therapists, Prosthetists, orthotists and healthcare providers to foster a holistic approach to innovation, ensuring that the needs of end-users are met effectively.

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PANEL VIII:
INCLUDE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSES & PROVIDE TECHNICAL AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE THROUGH INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION TO SUPPORT NATIONAL EFFORTS

Aim: To focus on including assistive technology in humanitarian responses and providing technical and economic assistance through international cooperation.

Objectives:
1. Discuss the role of assistive technology in humanitarian situations.
2. Explore strategies for including assistive technology in humanitarian aid.
3. Highlight the need for international cooperation in supporting national efforts.
4. Share examples of successful humanitarian initiatives involving assistive technology.

Pillars:
1. **Humanitarian assistance guidelines:** Develop guidelines for including assistive technology in humanitarian responses, ensuring that individuals with disabilities have access to essential assistive products during crises.
2. **International cooperation agreements:** Strengthen international cooperation agreements to facilitate the sharing of resources and expertise in providing technical and economic assistance for assistive technology.
3. **Emergency stockpiles:** Establish emergency stockpiles of essential assistive products in regions prone to disasters to ensure rapid deployment during emergencies.
4. **Training for humanitarian workers:** Provide training to humanitarian workers on the importance of assistive technology and its inclusion in emergency response efforts.

Members:
- Mr Manish Das, Deputy Head, ICRC (Chairperson)
- Ms Charu Sharma, ICRC (Moderator)
- Mr Navid Dadbin
- Dr Sanjay Wadhwa
- Dr Md. Ameel
- Dr Ashoo Grover
- Dr Manoj Kar

Key recommendations from the panel discussion
1. **To develop/update humanitarian assistance guidelines on assistive technology:** Develop new guidelines or update the existing humanitarian assistance guidelines by integrating the provision of assistive technology into them. These guidelines should address the need for assistive technology during emergencies such as natural disasters, conflicts and other situations of violence and avail the products to people in need. The specific needs of persons with disabilities should be addressed and integrated into the holistic plan.

   To develop the guidelines, various groups of stakeholders including government agencies, non-profit organizations, humanitarian organizations, representatives of service users, manufacturers, service providers and academic institutions should be gathered to form the relevant working group responsible for the development of the guidelines.

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2. **To establish emergency stockpiles of assistive products:** Develop emergency stockpiles of assistive technology by involving key stakeholders including government agencies, non-profit organizations, humanitarian organizations, representatives of service users, manufacturers, service providers and academic institutions. The respective working group will be responsible for developing the essential emergency stockpiles for the country.

   The developed emergency stockpiles can be adapted to the specific requirements of every region. For this, sub-working groups with representation from different states can be formed to customize the list. Consultants from the countries advanced in this field can be included in the working groups for knowledge and experience sharing.

3. **To develop training programmes for humanitarian workers on assistive technology:** Create a collaborative working group involving key stakeholders including government agencies, non-profit organizations, humanitarian and development organizations with expertise on assistive technology, representatives of service users, manufacturers, service providers and academic institutions to develop comprehensive training modules in the field of assistive technology. These modules should cover a wide range of topics, from basic concepts to advanced applications, to ensure a well-rounded workforce.

   This working group will bring together experts to design standardized, evidence-based training materials, fostering consistency and quality across various training programs. These modules should address the identified skills and competencies required in the assistive technology workforce, making it easier for institutions and individuals to access relevant resources.

4. **To strengthen the international cooperation agreements in the field of assistive technology:** To collate success stories and lessons learnt from previous and ongoing international cooperation agreements and disseminate among the various policy and decision makers at relevant ministries to enhance the knowledge on the matter across the government agencies.

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ANNEXURE-I

DAY 1 - WEDNESDAY, 01 NOVEMBER, 2023

Programme	Speaker	Time
Registration - High Tea		**10:00-11:00 am**
Inauguration ceremony	1. Mr Rajesh Aggarwal, Secretary DEPwD, MoSJ&E, **Chairperson** 2. Dr Rajiv Bahl, Secretary DHR & DG, ICMR, **Host** 3. Kedir Awol Omar, Head of Delegation, ICRC, Co-host	11:00-11:50 am
Introduction to NConSPAT-23 scientific sessions	**Dr Salaj Rana, ICMR**	**11:50-12:00 pm**
Panel discussion 1 *"Strengthening rehabilitation in health systems"*	**Chairperson:** Prof (Dr) Rajinder K Dhamija, Professor of Neurology, IHBAS **Moderator:** Dr Avijit Bansal, AIIMS 1. Dr Ravinder Singh, ICMR 2. Dr Ruchi Varshney 3. Dr Suman Badhal, VMMC 4. Mr Gopal Pandian, OPAI 5. Dr Gita Handa, AIIMS	
Lunch break		**1:00-2:00 pm**
Panel discussion 2 *"Improve access to assistive technology within all key development sectors"*	**Chairperson:** Dr. Gowri Sen Gupta, DDG, CHEB, MoH **Moderator:** Dr Geeta Rani, ICMR 1. Dr Jitender Sharma, CEO 2. Dr Madan Gopal, NHSRC 3. Ms Albina Shankar, Director, Mobility India 4. Mr Hunny, TorchIT 5. Dr Hemlata, IGNOU	2:00-3:00 pm
Panel discussion 3 *"Ensure that assistive products are safe, effective and affordable"*	**Chairperson:** Dr A K Yadav, Professor, AFMS **Moderator:** Dr Neha Dahiya, ICMR 1. Mr P J Singh, Tynor 2. Dr Prasanth Vinjamuri, BIS 3. Dr Sujata Srinivasan, IIT-Madras 4. Mr Siddarth Daga, Neomotion	3:00-4:00 pm
Break – High Tea		**4:00-4:15 pm**
Panel discussion 4 *"Enlarge, diversify and improve human resource capacity"*	**Chairperson:** Dr. R.K. Srivastava, Ex-DGHS & Senior Advisor, WISH Foundation **Moderator:** Dr Salaj Rana, ICMR 1. Dr Rajendra P. Gupta, Health Parliament 2. Mr Rajeev Sharma, DEPwD 3. A. Srija, Ministry of Education 4. Dr Sanjiv K Jha, President, IAP 5. Mr Rajesh Tiwari, IAAT	4:15-5:15 pm

DAY 2 - THURSDAY, 02 NOVEMBER, 2023

Programme	Speaker	Time
Recap on day 1		**9:00 – 9:30 am**
Registration - High Tea		**9:30–10:00 am**
Panel discussion 5 *"Actively involve users of assistive technology and their families"*	**Chairperson:** Mr. Justin Jesudas, IIT-Delhi **Moderator:** Mr Navid Dadbin, ICRC 1. Mr Ankit Jindal 2. Mr Arman Ali, NCPED 3. Mr Santosh, CURE 4. Ms Madhavi, YTWC 5. Dr N S Senthil, APD	10:00–11:00 am
Panel discussion 6 *"Invest in data and evidence-based policy"*	**Chairperson:** Dr Chapal Khasnabis, Ex-WHO, Consultant, ADB **Moderator:** Mr Ranjani Bhushan, ICRC 1. Dr Imtiaz Ahmad, Help Age 2. Dr Sandeep Singh, AIIMS 3. Ms Meera Shenoy, Youth4Jobs 4. Dr Md Asheel, WHO 5. Mr Siddarth Daga, Neomotion	11:00–12:00 pm
Panel discussion 7 *"Invest in research, innovation and an enabling ecosystem"* *"Develop and invest in enabling environments"*	**Chairperson:** Dr Shirshendu Mukherjee, Mission Director, BIRAC **Moderator:** Mr Aijaz Rather, ICRC 1. Dr Ravinder Singh, ICMR 2. Mr Piyush Chanana, IIT-Delhi 3. Dr Sujatha Srinivasan, IIT- Chennai 4. Dr Salaj Rana, ICMR 5. Mr Rajesh Kumar Das, ALIMCO	12:00–1:00 pm
Lunchbreak		**1:00–2:00 pm**
Panel discussion 8 *"Include assistive technology in humanitarian responses"* *"Provide technical and economic assistance through international cooperation to support national efforts"*	**Chairperson:** Mr Manish Das, Deputy Head of Regional Delegation, ICRC **Moderator:** Ms Charu Sharma, ICRC 1. Mr Navid Dadbin, ICRC 2. Dr Sanjay Wadhwa, AIIMS 3. Dr Md. Ameel, WHO 4. Dr Ashoo Grover, ICMR 5. Dr Manoj Kar, XIM University	2:00–3:00 pm

Moderators: Dr Salaj Rana, ICMR; Dr Geeta, ICMR; Mr Navid Dadbin, ICRC; Mr Ranjani Bhushan, ICRC; Mr Aijaz Rather, ICRC and Ms Charu Sharma, ICRC.

First Draft of NConSPAT White Paper		3:00–4:00 pm
Closing Remarks & High Tea		**4:00–4:30 pm**

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ANNEXURE-II

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