

## **National Leprosy Eradication Programme**

The National Leprosy Eradication Programme is a centrally sponsored Health Scheme of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India. While the NLEP strategies & plans are formulated centrally, the programme is implemented by the States/UTs. The Programme is also supported as partners by the World Health Organization, the International Federation of Anti-leprosy Associations (ILEP) & certain Non Governmental organizations.

Leprosy is a chronic infectious disease caused by *Mycobacterium leprae*. It usually affects the skin and peripheral nerves, but has a wide range of clinical manifestations. The disease is characterized by long incubation period generally 5 to 7 years and is classified as pauci bacillary or multi bacillary, depending on the bacillary load. Leprosy is a leading cause of permanent physical disability. Timely diagnosis and treatment of cases, before nerve damage has occurred, is the most effective way of preventing disability due to leprosy. The earliest records of a 'leprosy like' disease come from Egypt, dating as far back as 1400 BC. In China and India the first records appeared in the sixth century BC. In China, a disciple of Confucius named Pai-Nie suffered from a disease resembling lepromatous leprosy, which was known at that time as 'li' or 'lai'. In India, leprosy was first described in the *SusruthSamhita* and treatment with 'Chaulmoogra' oil was known at that time.

Initially, leprosy patients were isolated and segregated. Communities were hostile to them and the patients were also self conscious and afraid to mix with the community. Leprosaria to segregate the patients from the community were built in Europe in the middle ages. Several statutory acts and laws were also enacted during that time against them. A drug "Chaulmoogra" oil was used for leprosy treatment until "Dapsone" was discovered with anti leprosy effects during 1940s. It

was in 1970s when multi drug therapy (MDT) consisting of Rifampicin, Clofazimine and Dapsone were identified as cure for leprosy which came into wide use from 1982 following the recommendations of WHO. Since then the services for leprosy patients gradually changed from institutional to outpatient care through health centres and field clinics.

Gradually the infected and cured leprosy patients began to be accepted by the Community as a result of intensive health education and visibly successful results of MDT.

The National Leprosy Eradication Programme was [launched.in](#) the year 1983. Exclusive Leprosy units are functioning as Government Leprosy Rehabilitation and Promotion Unit in Tambaram, Kancheepuram District Government Leprosy Centre, Polambakkam, Kanchipuram District Government Leprosy Centre, Tirumani Kanchipuram, District, Government Leprosy Silver Jubilee Clinic, Saidapet Kanchipuram District, under the control of this Directorate .