



**World Health  
Organization**

**India**

**Message from Dr Henk Bekedam, WHO Representative to India for  
11<sup>th</sup> Annual National Childhood Cancer Excellence Awards, 29 September 2019**

Namaste everyone!

It is my honor to address all you wonderful people, who have gathered to be a part of the Annual National Childhood Cancer Excellence Awards. Unfortunately, I am unable to join you for today, but I feel obliged to write to you and support the excellent work that you are doing.

Cancer as we all know can occur in people of all ages. It can affect any part of the body. Nearly 300 000 new cases of cancers are diagnosed each year among children aged 0-19 years. It is estimated that childhood cancer accounts for nearly 3-5% of total cancer cases in India.

The most effective strategy to reduce the burden of cancer in children is to focus on prompt and correct diagnosis followed by effective treatment. When identified early, cancer is more likely to respond to effective treatment.

Early diagnosis consists of 2 key components:

- awareness and
- access to quality care and treatment

Palliative care is also extremely important - it helps relieve symptoms caused by cancer. It improves the quality of life of patients as well as their care givers.

Cancer causes substantial economic burden to families. Government of India schemes such as Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojna mitigates the financial risk arising out of childhood cancer diagnosis, medicines, hospitalization, palliative care and other catastrophic health episodes.

Cancer prevention efforts in children need to focus on behaviours that will prevent children from developing preventable cancers, as an adult. For instance, people who smoke or chew tobacco are more prone to mouth, throat and lung cancer. We can also lower children's risk of getting cancer later in life by getting them vaccinated against HPV and helping them make healthy choices.

WHO last year launched the Global Initiative for Childhood Cancer, which aims to raise awareness of childhood cancer and expand the capacity of countries to deliver best practice in childhood cancer care. The target is to reach at least a 60% survival rate by 2030, thereby saving an additional one million lives.

My heartiest congratulations to Can Kids India for motivating and providing a platform to recognize the bravery and courage of young children fighting cancer.

There are many milestones along the road of having cancer – diagnosis, treatment, surgery to name a few. They are meaningful signs and progress marking how far cancer survivors have come on their journey.

I applaud your bravery – you are an inspiration to all of us! My best wishes to you for a healthy and happy life ahead... Thank you!

Dr Henk Bekedam, WHO Representative to India