

Expectations from Budget 2019- Neerja Birla

29 January 2019 | Views

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In the last couple of years, we have seen a lot of progress and positivity in our approach to mental healthcare. There has been an increase in the number of organizations (such as Mpower, for example) working to alleviate stigma, to create awareness and to provide some amount of mental health care, but that's not enough at all, considering the staggering number of people in the country who need help with mental healthcare (13.7%, i.e. 17.8 crore Indians). 80% of them do not even seek healthcare due to stigma and lack of access to facilities and doctors. With only 0.3 mental health professionals and 10 hospital beds per 100,000 people, and the economic burden of treatment, most people chose to suffer in silence.

Most developed countries allocate around 4 % of the budget for mental health, but in India, it's only around 0.4 per cent. I think that if we do not take effective steps now, it will only compound the impact that these rising mental health numbers have on our quality of life and on the economy. By 2030, the losses to the GDP due to mental health (lowered productivity, inability to work, absenteeism, etc.) will be in the trillions. We need to support and supercharge the impact of the positive steps (e.g. Mental Healthcare Act 2017) taken so far with the required funding so that we can actually implement changes, build infrastructure and to make mental healthcare accessible and affordable to every Indian.