

HRRIC to conduct advanced research on tobacco cessation

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With focus on smokeless tobacco (SLT) products like packaged tobacco, mishri, khaini, ghutka, and other new innovative products



Silicon-Valley based fund Metaform Ventures, lead by a serial entrepreneur Nilesh Jain, is incubating a Harm Reduction Research & Innovation Centre (HRRIC) to conduct advanced research on tobacco cessation and harm reduction, with focus on smokeless tobacco (SLT) products like packaged tobacco, mishri, khaini, ghutka, and other new innovative products like SNUS. Further, the focus will include research on chemical properties, manufacturing process, biomarkers of exposure, and epidemiological and toxicological studies across a slew of products, including SNUS, a moist powder smokeless tobacco product.

HRRIC aspires to build research capacity for south east asia, specifically India and be a leading centre of excellence that empowers interdisciplinary communities to conduct research on the hazards of substance use and conventional ways of harm reduction. The center plans to adopt an evidence-based approach to create a robust and credible analysis of drug-related harm and its long-term impact on the lives of people. HRRIC also aims to collaborate with entities focused on developing healthier alternatives in order to trigger the process of harm reduction.

Nilesh Jain, Managing Director says that “HRRIC seeks to build active research capacity & contribute towards overall substance & behavioural harm reduction. Currently, our focus is on the tobacco cessation market to stir awareness and research on harm caused by toxic constituents in the SLT products to save hundreds of thousands of lives. Ultimately, we want to create an ecosystem that is free from substance use, but with the help of the right tools, practices, resources, and support solutions. We hope, through our research initiatives, we are able to improve or give rise to cost-effective SLTs and also reduce the rate of deaths caused due to oral cancer or other tobacco-related illnesses.”

The center has recently received funding worth 2 Million USD to commence and provide hard empirical data that encourages the adoption of harm reduction tools, cessation techniques, and products for a tobacco-free India. With this new funding, HRRIC is looking to tackle the smokeless tobacco epidemic on a global scale and complement the process by innovating alternatives and safer options in the smokeless tobacco cessation market.

Researchers at the center will also examine the negative health, social, and legal impact of substance use and solutions to reduce or eliminate it. To expand its reach of research links, HRRIC will also be collaborating with key regulators, policymakers, and researchers to further advancements, standards, and guidelines in this subject.

While expressing the need for extensive research on tobacco cessation and harm reduction, Francie Patel, COO said, "Our approach is very simple – to generate robust, credible data that will not only fill the current gap in research but also spur interest across the research community to become proactive in setting up lab testing infrastructure for Indian SLT product characterization and building research capacity. This focus on HPHC SLT characterization would not only massively improve the innovation of cost-effective SLTs but also help researchers to reduce some of the highest oral cancer death rates and tobacco-related disability rates."

Industry-wide studies suggest that the use of smokeless tobacco products (SLT) has resulted in approximately 90% of oral cancers in India or 300,000 deaths per year. In line with this outcome, HRRIC's main objective is to perform and project the characterization of harmful and potentially harmful constituents in Indian smokeless tobacco products and test them individually to aid product innovators and regulators to introduce safer alternatives or create injunction to prevent future harm.

Going forward, HRRIC also envisions launching programs, practices, and treatments for overcoming drug addiction and management.