

National Policy for Older Persons (NPOP), 1999

Introduction

India has a large and growing elderly population. According to census data, there are over **100 million older persons** in India, and this number is increasing every year. To address their needs and protect their rights, the Government of India announced the **National Policy for Older Persons (NPOP) in 1999**.

The National Policy on Senior Citizens 2011 (NPSC 2011) is an updated framework by the **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** that replaces the 1999 policy. It treats senior citizens as a valuable resource rather than a burden, focusing on their rights, security, and full participation in society. India's **National Policy for Senior Citizens (NPSC)** and its predecessor, the **National Policy on Older Persons (NPOP)**, aim to ensure **financial security**, affordable healthcare, shelter, and **protection** against abuse for elderly citizens. These overarching frameworks are implemented through dedicated legislation and targeted welfare initiatives.

This policy recognizes that older persons have made important contributions to society and deserve to live with **dignity, care, and security** in their old age.

Definition of "Older Person"

Under this policy, any person who is **60 years of age or above** is considered an older person.

Main Objectives of the Policy

The National Policy for Older Persons has the following key objectives:

1. To ensure the **financial security** of elderly people
 2. To provide **healthcare** and nutrition support
 3. To ensure **shelter and housing** for the needy elderly
 4. To protect elderly persons from **abuse and exploitation**
 5. To promote **active ageing** — encouraging elderly people to remain productive and engaged
 6. To strengthen **intergenerational bonds** between the young and the old
 7. To provide support to **elderly women**, who are more vulnerable
 8. To make elderly persons **aware of their rights and available services**
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Key Areas Covered by the Policy

1. Financial Security

Many elderly people, especially those in the unorganised sector, have no pension or savings. The policy focuses on:

- Providing **old age pensions** to those who are poor
- Encouraging families to take care of elderly members financially
- Promoting savings schemes and insurance for senior citizens

2. Healthcare

Old age brings many health problems. The policy emphasizes:

- **Free or subsidised medical care** for elderly persons
- Special **geriatric wards** in government hospitals
- Training of doctors and nurses in geriatric care (care of the elderly)
- Promoting **preventive healthcare** — regular check-ups, healthy diet, and exercise
- Special attention to **mental health** problems like depression and dementia

3. Shelter and Housing

The policy recognizes that many elderly persons have no secure place to live, especially widows and those abandoned by families. It focuses on:

- Building **old age homes** for the destitute elderly
- Providing **day care centres** where elderly people can spend the day safely
- Ensuring that housing schemes consider the special needs of elderly persons (ramps, railings, accessible toilets)

4. Education and Information

Many elderly people do not know about government schemes, pensions, or their legal rights. The policy aims to:

- Make elderly people **aware of their rights and entitlements**
- Promote **adult education** and lifelong learning
- Use media (TV, radio) to spread awareness about elder care

5. Welfare of Elderly Women

Elderly women in India are among the most vulnerable — they are more likely to be widowed, have no income, and face neglect. The policy gives **special attention to elderly women** by:

- Providing pension and housing support
- Protecting them from domestic violence and abuse
- Ensuring their access to healthcare

6. Protection from Abuse

Elder abuse — physical, emotional, or financial — is a serious problem. The policy states that:

- Families and society must **protect elderly persons from all forms of abuse**
- Legal mechanisms must be strengthened to punish abusers
- This was later strengthened by the **Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007**

7. Productive and Active Ageing

The policy does not see elderly people as passive receivers of care. It encourages:

- Elderly persons to remain **socially active and productive**
- Involvement in **voluntary work, community activities**, and cultural programmes
- Use of their **experience and wisdom** for nation-building

8. Role of Family and Society

The policy strongly emphasizes that the **family is the first and most important support system** for elderly people. It encourages:

- Families to care for their elderly members at home
- Communities to develop support systems for elderly neighbours
- NGOs and civil society to play an active role in elder care

VII. Welfare

- The government will create a **Welfare Fund for Senior Citizens**, funded through a social security tax. This money will be shared with states based on their senior citizen population. States can also create their own similar funds.

- Voluntary organizations providing home-based services to senior citizens will be encouraged and supported, helping elderly people and their families better manage the challenges of old age.

- All senior citizens — especially widows, single women, and the very old — will be covered under all government schemes. They will be given **Aadhaar cards on priority** for easy access to services.

- More budget will be set aside for the special needs of poor senior citizens living in both villages and cities.

VIII. Multigenerational Bonding

- Schools will include lessons on caring for elders and family values. NCERT and State Education Boards will develop **Value Education modules and textbooks** teaching children the importance of looking after their parents and grandparents.

IX. Media

- Media has an important role in highlighting the situation of senior citizens. Both **mass media** and **traditional local communication channels** will be used to spread awareness about ageing issues.

X. Natural Disasters and Emergencies

42. Senior citizens will have **equal access** to food, shelter, and medical care during and after disasters.

43. Extra financial help will be provided to senior citizens to help them **rebuild their lives and communities** after an emergency.

Implementation — Who is Responsible?

The policy assigns responsibilities to different bodies:

- **Central Government** — Making laws, funding schemes, and setting standards
- **State Governments** — Implementing schemes at the local level
- **Local Bodies (Panchayats, Municipalities)** — Reaching elderly people at the grassroots level
- **NGOs and Voluntary Organizations** — Running old age homes, day care centres, and awareness programmes
- **Families** — Primary caregivers

Criticism and Limitations of the Policy

While the NPOP 1999 was a positive step, it has faced several criticisms:

1. It is a **policy, not a law** — it cannot be legally enforced
2. Implementation has been **weak and uneven** across states
3. It does **not cover the unorganised sector** adequately
4. There is **lack of funds** allocated specifically for elderly welfare
5. Many elderly people, especially in rural areas, are **not aware** of this policy

Due to these gaps, the government introduced the **Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007**, which gives legal teeth to the protection of elderly persons.

Conclusion

The **National Policy for Older Persons, 1999** was a landmark step by the Indian government to recognize the needs and rights of elderly citizens. It covers financial security, healthcare, housing, protection from abuse, and active ageing. However, a policy alone is not enough — **strong implementation, community participation, and family support** are equally important. Social workers play a key role in connecting elderly people to the benefits and protections promised by this policy.