

Project Core: An Initiative for Community-Focused Oral Health Research for Equity Launched

Category: Business

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Oral diseases are among the most prevalent diseases globally and have serious health and economic burdens, greatly reducing quality of life. The most prevalent and consequential oral diseases globally are dental caries (tooth decay) periodontal disease, tooth loss, and cancers of the lips and oral cavity.

Project Core Team at Launch event in Delhi

In an endeavour to address, the oral health burden in India and strengthen health systems ensuring that high quality oral health services are available, affordable and accessible by all, Project CORE an initiative for Community Focused Oral

Health Research for Equity was launched. This research collaboration between by the Public Health Foundation of India, in partnership with Jamia Millia Islamia University, Jan Swasthya Sewa Sansthan in collaboration with Queen Mary University of London, University College London and renowned oral health experts. The research team was awarded a prestigious grant by the **National Institute for Health and Care Research, UK** to help improve the health outcomes and re-orient health systems to effectively address the oral health burden.

The project was launched by Prof. Mohammad Shakeel, Honorable Vice Chancellor, Jamia Millia Islamia University and Prof. K Srinath Reddy, Founder (Past) President & Distinguished Professor of Public Health, Public Health Foundation of India, Prof. Richard Watt Professor & Chair of Dental Public Health, University College London, Prof. Manu Raj Mathur who is steering the project from PHFI, Ms. Mirai Chatterjee Director, Sewa Social Security, Prof Keya Sircar, Dean, Faculty of Dentistry, Jamia Millia Islamia, Prof Mahesh Verma, Vice Chancellor, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Prof. Abhishek Mehta from JMI and Prof. O P Kharbanda, ex-Head, Centre for Dental Education and Research, AIIMS New Delhi were other key partners of this initiative.

Speaking on the occasion:

Prof Sanjay Zodpey, President, PHFI said, *“Today marks an important milestone in our continued efforts through Project CORE – a pivotal initiative designed to address oral health inequities across India. This project is particularly special to us at PHFI as it aligns perfectly with our mission of improving population health outcomes. By collaborating with local communities, stakeholders, and international experts, we aim to reshape oral health research, integrate community perspectives, and advocate for systemic reforms”.*

Professor Richard Watt, UCL, Chair of Dental Public Health,

"Oral health is at a tipping point. Globally it is now recognised as a global health priority. The CORE programme is a new global health research initiative working across India, Brazil, Kenya and Colombia to investigate oral health inequalities. A key element of the programme is working with local communities to co-produce new solutions to improve oral health."

Prof Manu Raj Mathur, QMUL and India lead for the project at PHFI said, *"Empowering the next generation of oral health leaders, Project CORE is not just about building skills-its about transforming communities through innovative capacity building that bridges gaps, fosters equitable access to dental care for all and aims at creating next generation of leaders that can create sustainable oral health systems."*

Prof. K. Srinath Reddy, Distinguished Professor of Public Health, PHFI, *"Good oral health is essential for every person on earth throughout life. Apart from teeth being directly linked to nutrition, gum disease triggers inflammation which affects many organs including heart, blood vessels and the brain. From caries to cancer, there are many oral diseases which should be prevented but also provided restorative care when they occur. Despite the widespread need for easily accessible and affordable oral health services, most countries have not included them in the universal health coverage programme. This affects vulnerable sections of the population who are deprived of needed care. The multi-country CORE study, which will map the unmet community needs for oral health services, will help to spotlight the extent of equity gaps in oral health services and catalyse the inclusion of essential oral health services in national programmes for universal health coverage."*

The CORE initiative aims to establish sustainable oral health research capacity in India by building partnerships between local and international institutions. It aims to reduce oral health inequalities and promoting better population oral

health by developing scalable, evidence-based interventions that can be integrated into public health policies. To improve affordability and accessibility of oral health for marginalized populations by influencing policy reform for the integration of oral health services into broader health systems. There are Community focused and guided project pilots in the States of Delhi, Haryana, Gujarat, and Rajasthan being conducted to understand the patterns, mechanisms, and impacts of oral health inequalities while developing public health interventions to reduce these disparities

India is facing a significant burden of oral diseases, with over 70% of the population affected by oral diseases. These issues, particularly prevalent among disadvantaged communities, severely impact the quality of life and contribute to the overall burden on the healthcare system. Indians have a relatively high incidence of dental caries in permanent teeth compared to the entire South Asian population, with about a third of the Indian population experiencing caries that require dental treatment. Oral cancer accounts for over 30% of all cancers in the country, with age-adjusted rates being as high as 20 per 100,000 population. Despite being preventable, oral diseases continue to be under-addressed, leading to increased healthcare costs and worsening public health outcomes.

About the Partners

About the Public Health Foundation of India

The Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI) is a not-for-profit public-private initiative working towards a healthier India. A national consultation, convened by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in September 2004, recommended a foundation that could rapidly advance public health education, training, research, and advocacy. PHFI is a response to the limited public health institutional capacity and was established to strengthen training, research and policy

through interdisciplinary and health system connected education and training, policy and programme-relevant research, evidence based & equity promoting policy development, affordable health technologies, people empowering health promotion & advocacy for prioritized health causes in the area of Public Health in India. The setting up of PHFI in 2006 was enabled by the Government of India and the Foundation (registered as a Society) is managed by an empowered governing board comprising senior government officials, eminent Indian and international academic and scientific leaders, civil society representatives and corporate leaders. The Foundation is headquartered in New Delhi and its established Indian Institutes of Public Health (IIPH) set up by PHFI have a presence in Hyderabad, Delhi NCR, Gandhinagar, Bhubaneswar and Shillong. www.phfi.org

Jamia Millia Islamia University

Jamia Millia Islamia, an institution originally established at Aligarh in United Provinces, India in 1920 became a Central University by an act of the Indian Parliament in 1988. In Urdu language, Jamia means 'University', and Millia means 'National'. Jamia Millia Islamia, founded in 1920, evolved from a nationalist movement into a prominent educational institution. Overcoming financial crises and political challenges, it relocated to Delhi in 1925, and steadily grew through the efforts of visionary leaders like Dr. Zakir Husain. Jamia expanded its academic offerings, establishing numerous faculties and research centers, including engineering, mass communication, and Islamic studies. In 1988, it became a central university, further advancing in research, education, and information technology. Today, it stands as a renowned academic institution with a strong emphasis on innovative education and global outreach.

Queen Mary University of London

Queen Mary University of London traces its origins to four

historic institutions: St Bartholomew's Hospital Medical College (1785), London Hospital Medical College, Westfield College, and Queen Mary College. These institutions were founded to improve access to education and healthcare for underprivileged communities, with Westfield College being one of the first colleges in London for women. Over the years, Queen Mary expanded its academic offerings, establishing a School of Law in 1965 and the UK's first Centre for Commercial Law Studies in 1980. After key mergers, including with Bart's and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry in 1995, it became a leading university. In 2009, it joined the prestigious Russell Group, marking its status as a world-class research institution.

University College London

Founded in 1826, UCL is London's leading multidisciplinary university, known for academic excellence and progressive thinking. It has over 16,000 staff and 51,000 students from more than 150 countries. UCL is recognized globally, ranking 9th in the world (QS 2025) and 2nd in the UK for research power (REF 2021). It was the first university in England to welcome students of any religion, women, and to teach subjects like English and Engineering. With 32 Nobel laureates, UCL fosters innovation and real-world impact, offering over 400 undergraduate and 700 postgraduate programs, and partnering with institutions worldwide. UCL was named University of the Year 2024 by The Times and Sunday Times.

The National University of Colombia

The National University of Colombia founded in 1867, is a leading public research institution with campuses in Bogotá, Medellín, Manizales, Palmira, and satellite locations. With over 53,000 students, it offers 450 academic programs, including 95 undergraduate and 65 doctoral degrees. Known for its rigorous academics and scientific output, the university ranks #2 in Colombia and #10 in Latin America (QS 2023). The

Bogot campus, designed by German architects, is the largest in Colombia and features notable landmarks like the Len de Greiff Auditorium. The Medelln campus, home to the renowned School of Mines, is known for its engineering programs and cultural significance, with historic architecture and museums.

University of Staffordshire

Staffordshire University, founded in 1914 as the Central School of Science and Technology, has deep roots in supporting the pottery and mining industries of Stoke-on-Trent. Over time, it evolved through various forms, becoming Staffordshire Polytechnic in 1971 before gaining university status in 1992. The university's long history is marked by its dedication to practical education and strong ties with local industries. Today, it stands as a leader in innovation, with a focus on digital technology, healthcare, and creative industries. Known for its cutting-edge research and world-class facilities, such as the Centre for Health Innovation, Staffordshire University equips students with hands-on, real-world learning experiences. The Stoke-on-Trent campus remains a focal point for community engagement and academic excellence. While it continues to play a key role in regional development, Staffordshire's global partnerships also extend its impact across international academic and industrial landscapes, further cementing its place as a pioneer in education and innovation.

ABRASCO

The Brazilian Association of Collective Health (ABRASCO), founded in the 1970s, has played a pivotal role in advancing public health in Brazil. Initially formed to challenge traditional health practices and advocate for reforms, it has been a key advocate for Brazil's Unified Health System (SUS), fighting for health equity and access to services. Over the years, ABRASCO has significantly contributed to scientific research, education, and public policy in public health. It

actively promotes partnerships with international bodies, including the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), and fosters collaboration across Latin America and beyond. ABRASCO is renowned for its major congresses, such as the “Abrasca,” which brings together thousands of professionals, researchers, and policymakers to discuss critical issues in collective health, including recent challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Its influence extends to global public health discourse, with an emphasis on democratizing healthcare and addressing social inequalities in health.