

Disabilities battle making progress

National campaign minimizes risks through checkups, more awareness

By CHENG SI
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Genetic disorders and acquired disabilities in China have witnessed a steady decline in recent years after the implementation of a State-level campaign on preventing and treating disabilities, experts said.

In December 2021, the State Council, China's Cabinet, launched the campaign with the aim of bolstering the national disability prevention system by promoting healthcare knowledge and improving health checkups and disease screening, medical treatment and rehabilitation.

The campaign set a 2025 target to achieve progress in these areas by helping people control disability risks and minimizing hereditary diseases, illnesses and accidental injuries.

Some of the main indexes measuring disability prevention — such as the rate of premarital checkups and genetic screening of newborns — aspire to reach the same levels as high and medium income countries. For example, the campaign sets the target of raising the rate of premarital checkups from 68.5 percent in 2020 to above 70 percent by 2025. Some of these targets have already been achieved.

“The campaign has so far operated smoothly,” said Hu Xiangyang, director of the rehabilitation department of the China Disabled Persons’ Federation.

After the campaign was announced a working team in charge of its implementation was established, he said. The team is supported by 19 central departments including the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the National Development and Reform Commission.

Under the initiative, books have been published nationwide to increase knowledge about disability prevention and educational activities have also been organized, Hu said. As part of their routine work, governments at all levels have also promoted healthcare and disability prevention in recent years to help raise people's awareness of the issue.

Hu said social services relating to premarital and pre-pregnancy healthcare have also been boosted, along with the capability of medical services offering prenatal diagnosis to “further curb the risks of birth defects and developmental disabilities”.

The nation's rate of premarital checkups has reached 70.9 percent and the rate of prenatal screening 85.7 percent, Hu said. “The screening rate of newborns for hereditary diseases and hearing (impairment) are 98.1 percent and 97.1 percent respectively, so far,” he said.

National Health Commission statistics show that from 2020 to last year, the rate of people taking premarital health checkups rose by 6.3 percentage points and the rate of women receiving prenatal examinations increased by 7.6 percentage points.

Over 90 percent of infants have had medical checkups for inherited metabolic diseases and hearing impairment in recent years,



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Xing Ruoqi, senior official from the National Health Commission

according to the commission.

Deaths caused by severe birth defects have also been brought under better control in recent years. Fatalities of infants and children under five years of age caused by birth defects dropped by over 20 percent from 2018 to 2021. The rate of birth defects that can cause disabilities, such as neural tube defects and limb reduction, also saw a marked decrease over the period, the commission said.

“Over 100 million women have benefited from our public services such as pre-pregnancy examinations, and folic acid supplementation in cases of neural tube defects,” said Xing Ruoqi, a senior official from the commission.

More effective measures have also been taken to lower the risks

of accidental injuries and promote rehabilitation.

In recent years, the nation has stepped up efforts to standardize the management of chronic diseases and improve care for people with severe mental disorders, said Hu from the disabled persons’ federation.

Supervision of occupational illnesses has also been intensified.

Hu said there had been several inspections of transportation management safety along with pollution management and drinking water safety to ensure the public's health.

“In 2022, the number of safety accidents decreased by 24 percent year-on-year,” he said.

Good results have also been achieved in rehabilitation.

About 407,000 disabled children received rehabilitation assistance last year and over eight million adults with disabilities received social services assistance with their rehabilitation, Hu said.

However, China still faces challenges in preventing disabilities because of its aging population and the impact of industrialization and urbanization, which may bring an increased risk of disabilities.

“We will more actively engage in coordinating departments to channel their efforts and resources into the implementation of the national disability prevention campaign, to offer the public all-around and whole-process services to reduce or control the occurrence of disabilities,” he added.

Policy Digest

Plan for cross-Strait tech cooperation approved

The State Council, China's Cabinet, has approved a plan aiming to turn Dongguan in South China's Guangdong province into a hub for cross-Strait cooperation on technological and industrial innovation.

The plan lays out 12 key tasks to promote cooperation to build a modern industrial system and create a common market across the Taiwan Strait, according to a National Development and Reform Commission official.

Dongguan is one of the regions in the Chinese mainland with the highest concentrations of Taiwan companies and Taiwan investment, the official said. The city has more than 3,800 Taiwan companies, and is home to about 50,000 Taiwan compatriots, according to the official.

It is also a hub for advanced manufacturing in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, and has been working with Taiwan compatriots and Taiwan companies to further implement an innovation-driven development strategy, the official said.

The plan is a demonstration of respect and care for Taiwan compatriots, and sends a clear signal on deepening cross-Strait cooperation on innovative development, the official also said.

Flu vaccinations urged for most of population

The Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention has updated its guideline for flu vaccination, suggesting that everyone aged six months and above who is not at risk of harm should get vaccinated against flu.

The updated guideline suggested high-risk people or those who need special attention get vaccinated promptly, including medical workers, people aged 60 years and above, people who have one or more chronic conditions, children, and pregnant women.

The center said health institutions nationwide should start giving flu vaccinations as soon as possible.

Pregnant women can get inoculated with inactivated flu vaccines at any stage of their pregnancy, it added.

The center said it will keep updating the guideline according to the progress of research both at home and abroad.

Ministry moves to stabilize key industries

In an effort to keep up the steady growth of China's industrial economy, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and other departments have issued work plans to stabilize the performance of 10 key industries.

The 10 industries include steel, nonferrous metal, petrochemicals, building materials, automobile and electronic information manufacturing.

“If we stabilize (the growth of) these key industries, we will basically stabilize (the growth of) the industrial economy,” said ministry official Tao Qing at a news conference earlier this month.

The ministry will work with other departments, local authorities and industry associations to implement the work plans, and will conduct research to come up with more measures to improve the industrial economy, Tao said.

WANG QINGYUN

Rehabilitation services help boost quality of life, integration into society

By CHENG SI

China is channeling more resources and efforts into rehabilitation services for people with disabilities, especially children, to improve their quality of life and acceptance in society.

“Rehabilitation services are a vital way of bettering disabled children's physical functions and promoting their comprehensive development,” said Hu Xiangyang, director of the rehabilitation department of the China Disabled Persons’ Federation.

“Early in June 2018, the State Council released a guideline, requiring county-level authorities and above to offer rehabilitation

assistance to children aged up to six who have autism, or disabilities including visual and hearing impairment, speech, physical as well as intellectual disabilities.”

About 407,000 disabled children received rehabilitation assistance last year compared with only 157,000 in 2018, he said.

As of July 31, a total of 318,000 children with disabilities had used these services nationwide, up 18.2 percent year-on-year.

Other organizations also offer rehabilitation services to people with disabilities. For example, Zhijiang Social Work Development Services Center in Zhejiang province conducted a 10-month campaign from August 2021 to June last year.

The center organized 36 horticulture therapy events as well as 33 exercise therapy sessions for about 1,800 disabled people and their relatives.

The center said disabled people can benefit by feeling the living energy of plants, heal themselves mentally and use their hands during horticulture therapy.

Exercise rehabilitation helps disabled people relax and gain the trust of social workers.

Dong Gongmao, Party secretary of Haishu district's disabled persons’ federation of Zhejiang's Ningbo city, said offering rehabilitation services is of great importance and can generate remarkable economic and social benefits.

“Our federation is discussing cooperation with some hospitals, under which people can receive medical treatment at the hospitals and domestic rehabilitation after returning home.

“These combined services can help the recovery of limb function and reduce the possibility of acquiring a disability, which in the long run relieves the burden on the family and governments’ financial burden,” he said.

Feng Dong is the director of the Ningbo Xingbao Autism Family Support Center in Zhejiang and his daughter has autism.

He said that children with autism need lifelong intervention and help, but many rehabilitation

institutes refuse to take care of autistic children above 6 or 9 years.

“My center is more like a middleman between rehabilitation centers and parents of autistic children to let these parents know where they can get reliable rehabilitation services for their kids. Also, we ease the parents’ concerns and give them lectures to teach them how to get along with their kids in the right way. This creates a more healthy rehabilitation environment for the autistic children,” he said.

However, he warned that the rehabilitation industry is experiencing unfettered growth and many parents may be deceived by

unauthorized institutes.

Dong, from the Haishu district's disabled persons’ federation, said that most of the national funds for disabled people are used to build infrastructure, so rehabilitation services may not be getting enough financial support.

“The public lacks a correct understanding of rehabilitation services and the sector also faces a talent shortage of qualified personnel operating the services,” Dong said.

According to the China Disabled Persons’ Federation, the nation had 11,661 registered rehabilitation organizations at the end of last year, with around 328,000 people working in the industry.