

**NALSA (Legal Services to the Mentally Ill and
Mentally Disabled Persons) Scheme, 2015**

NALSA (Legal Services to the Mentally Ill and Mentally Disabled Persons) Scheme, 2015

BACKGROUND

Persons with disabilities, especially those suffering from mental illness and other barriers like mental retardation are usually not those who catch the attention of the authorities that be. They are sidelined and are viewed only from the prism of the paternalistic “social welfare” which looks upon them merely as persons who are in need of special protection by the State and the society. India is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) 2008 and since our country has ratified the Convention, it is obligatory for our legal system to ensure that human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disability (including mentally ill persons and persons with mental disabilities) are enjoyed on equal basis with others and to ensure that they get equal recognition before the law and equal protection of the law. The Convention further requires us to ensure effective access to justice for persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others.

Under Section 12 of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, persons who are disabled as defined in clause (i) of Section 2 of the Persons With Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 and those in a psychiatric hospital or in a psychiatric nursing home within the meaning of clause (q) of Section 2 of the Mental Health Act, 1987 are entitled to legal services. Hence NALSA had drawn up a scheme to provide effective legal services to the mentally ill and mentally disabled, in 2010, in terms of its mandate under S.4 (b) of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987.

Though the Scheme was first launched in 2010, from the reports received from all the States on its implementation, it appears that there is a need to review the scheme to strengthen the services rendered by the State Legal Services Authorities/Legal Services Institutions to these marginalised people to enable them to access justice. There is imperative need for a proactive outreach to these people. So far, the SLSAs/DLSAs

seem to be concerned only with matters reaching them. Even then, there remains much to be done in court related activities.

It is in this background, that this new Scheme for Legal Services to the Mentally Ill and Mentally Disabled persons has been drawn up as “**NALSA (Legal Services to the Mentally Ill and Mentally Disabled Persons) Scheme, 2015**”.

OBJECTIVES

This Scheme includes fresh guidelines to the Legal Services Institutions (State Legal Services Authorities, District Legal Services Authorities, Taluk Legal Services Committees, High Court Legal Services Committees, Supreme Court Legal Services Committee) to be followed while they render legal services to the mentally ill and persons with mental disabilities. The objective is to ensure that the mentally ill or mentally disabled are not stigmatized and they are dealt with as individuals who are to be helped to enforce all rights they are entitled to and as assured to them by law.

The terms PLVs, Legal Services Clinics, Front Office , Panel Lawyers and Retainer Lawyers will mean the same as defined under the National Legal Services Authority (Free and Competent Legal Services) Regulations, 2010 and National Legal Services Authority (Legal Services Clinics) Regulations, 2011 and the NALSA Scheme for Para Legal Volunteers (Revised) and Module for the Orientation – Induction – Refresher Courses for PLV Training.

PART- I:

PRINCIPLES

While dealing with Mentally Ill or Mentally Disabled Persons, the Legal Services Institutions must keep in mind the following factors:-

- (1) **Mental illness is curable** – The Legal Services Institutions shall keep in mind the fact that mental illness is curable on proper medication and care.

- (2) **Mentally disabled persons are not mentally ill persons** –Mentally disabled persons are suffering from mental disabilities due to developmental disorders. Mental Retardation (MR) is of permanent nature and is not curable. So also Autism and Cerebral Palsy. They are, therefore, treated as persons with disabilities under Section 2 of the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 (PWD Act). The statutory provisions for the welfare of mentally disabled persons are (i) PWD Act, 1995 and; (ii) National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999 .
- (3) **Mentally ill and Mentally disabled persons are entitled to all human rights and fundamental freedoms** – While dealing with mentally ill and mentally disabled persons for rendering legal services it shall be the prime concern of the legal services institutions to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms of these persons.
- (4) **Respect for the inherent dignity of mentally ill & mentally disabled persons** - The legal services institutions shall promote respect for the inherent dignity, individual autonomy including independence of mentally ill & mentally disabled persons.
- (5) **Non-discrimination** – The legal services institutions shall not discriminate mentally ill & mentally disabled persons merely because of his/her state of mental health. Rather, they are to be dealt with greater sensitivity and care.
- (6) **Reasonable Accommodation** – The legal services institutions shall make provisions including reasonable accommodation to ensure that persons with mental illness or mental disabilities have equal access to any scheme, programme, facility or service offered.

- (7) **The right of mentally ill persons to get treatment** – Right to treatment and to get proper health care, emanating from Article 21 of the Constitution of India is equally applicable to all mentally ill persons. Mentally ill persons are deprived of treatment either due to lack of information or due to illegal confinement because of superstition or lack of means or stigma. Therefore the legal services institutions shall ensure that such persons are able to access treatment facilities available in the psychiatric hospitals or psychiatric nursing homes by invoking the provisions in chapter IV of the Mental Health Act, 1987.
- (8) **Informed consent for treatment** – Legal services institutions shall ensure that when a person is subjected to treatment for mental illness, his / her informed consent is obtained. If any person is incapable of giving such consent, the informed consent of his / her relatives or friend and in their absence, the satisfaction of the court under Part II Chapter V of Mental Health Act, 1987 shall be ensured.
- (9) **Prevention of exploitation and abuse of mentally disabled persons** – Mentally disabled persons, particularly female mentally disabled, are one of the vulnerable groups most likely to be exploited. Therefore, the legal services institutions shall come to the assistance of mentally disabled persons in preventing their exploitation including sexual abuse and also for taking legal action against the abusers and exploiters.
- (10) Mentally disabled persons and, by and large, mentally ill persons, cannot fruitfully utilize information, because of their mentally challenged situation. Hence, they cannot be imparted with optimum legal literacy to empower them to access justice. Therefore, legal service institutions should assess and audit their eligibilities and needs, in terms of the laws, on collective as well as individual basis, and such requirements shall be addressed by extending legal services.

PART-II

LEGAL SERVICES TO THE MENTALLY ILL AND MENTALLY DISABLED PERSONS IN PSYCHIATRIC HOMES, HOSPITALS AND OTHER SIMILAR FACILITIES AND IN JAILS

The Mentally Ill and Mentally disabled persons used to be kept in jails under the head of “non-criminal lunatics”. Through directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in *Sheela Barse Vs. Union of India* and others (Criminal Petition No.237/1989) the Supreme Court deprecated this practice and declared that the admission of the non-criminal mentally ill persons in the jails was illegal and unconstitutional. The Supreme Court further directed that henceforth only Judicial Magistrates and no Executive Magistrate shall send a person who is mentally ill to places of safe custody for treatment. The Judicial Magistrates are also obligated to first seek the advice of a professional or psychiatrist before doing so. The Judicial Magistrates are also required to, as per the directions of the Supreme Court of India to send quarterly reports to the High Court setting out the number of cases sought to be screened and sent to places of safe custody and the action taken by the Judicial Magistrates thereon.

The Supreme Court of India transferred the records of the case to each High Court requesting the High Courts to register the records so received as a Public Interest Litigation treating the High Court Legal Services Committee as the Petitioner, to assist the High Court in the matter of monitoring compliance of the orders and directions of the Supreme Court of India and the orders of the High Court which may be passed from time to time.

In order to comply with the directions of the Supreme Court of India, the following actions need to be taken:

At Jails:

- The SLSAs will have to first ensure that the Public Interest Litigation is registered in the High Court and an Hon'ble Judge is designated to deal with the matter, as directed by the Supreme Court of India.

- The SLSAs will carry out inspection of all jails with the assistance of the State Mental Health Authority (SMHA) or any other team constituted by the High Court or under the directions of the High Court to ascertain whether there are any mentally ill and mentally disabled persons in the jails and if there are, to immediately seek appropriate directions from the High Court with regard to their shifting out and their treatment.
- The SLSAs will in coordination with the SMHA constitute a team of psychiatrists/psychologists /counsellors to visit the jails and assess the state of mental health of the inmates in jail. Depending on the need assessment by the team, SLSAs will initiate corrective measures necessary to facilitate the treatment of the jail inmate by psychologists or psychiatrists.
- In compliance of the orders of the Supreme Court of India, the Judicial Magistrates should also send quarterly reports to the High Court setting out the number of cases screened and sent to places of safe custody and the action taken by the Judicial Magistrates thereon. Intimation regarding every such reporting shall be given by the Judicial Magistrate to the SLSA, which, in turn, shall ensure that the said quarterly report gains prompt attention of the designate Hon'ble Judge and shall seek such directions and orders as may be found necessary; either general in nature, or as regards any particular individual or issue. SLSA shall, in the event of any such direction or order being issued, notify the DLSA/TLSC concerned to aid and monitor its compliance, and shall also bring to the notice of the designate Hon'ble Judge any non-compliance or deficiency in compliance of any such direction or order.

At psychiatric hospitals, homes and facilities:

- The SLSAs should request the High Court for the constitution under Section 37 of the Act a Board of Visitors for all psychiatric hospitals, homes and similar facilities, whether government run or privately run in the State, in which the Member Secretary/Full Time

Secretary, SLSAs/DLSAs should also be a Member. The Board of Visitors should regularly visit these to assess the living conditions of the inmates in these facilities, homes or hospitals.

- The SLSAs/ Board of Visitors should review the persons in these hospitals, homes and facilities to ascertain whether there are any cured persons staying there whose families appear reluctant to take them back or are themselves not able to contact their families. Whenever the SLSAs/DLSAs or Board of Visitors find such inmates the SLSAs/DLSAs must take all steps to facilitate restoration, including providing legal representation in court to seek orders for restoration of the cured person with the family.
- Legal services institutions shall during their visits to the psychiatric hospitals or homes or facilities ascertain through interaction with inmates , doctors and staff as to whether any of the persons admitted there are victims of forced admission or not. In such cases, legal services shall be given to such persons for their release from the psychiatric hospitals or homes or facilities.
- SLSAs/DLSAs should setup Legal Services Clinics at the psychiatric hospitals, homes and facilities in order to provide legal assistance wherever required to the Mentally Ill/ mentally disabled persons and their families to address legal issues concerning the mentally ill and mentally disabled persons.
- Such a legal clinic should be manned by Para Legal Volunteers and Panel Lawyers who are sensitive to such issues and persons.
- It would be quite appropriate to train the doctors, nurses and other para medical staff/administrative staff at the mental health facilities as Para Legal Volunteers so that the best legal services can be provided keeping in mind the welfare of the mentally ill / mentally disabled persons.
- The Clinic should also help in ensuring that the homes meant for the mentally ill and mentally disabled persons have all facilities,

including for learning appropriate skills for independent and/or assisted living and earning. The legal services institutions may approach the Government, and if necessary the High Court for appropriate directions, to ensure the availability of such facilities.

- The Legal Services Institutions should also connect the mentally disabled persons with the National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities so that benefits provided under the “National Trust For Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999” are assured to these persons and their families.
- Legal Services Institutions should involve through the PLVs the para medical staff/administrative staff and doctors at the mental health facilities to identify the relatives and homes of those patients in relation to whom such facts are not available on record and take appropriate steps through the different legal services institutions to reach to the relatives of the patients to facilitate re-union of the patients with the near and dear ones.
- Patients, who are housed in mental health centres, homes and facilities, away from their domicile and home, must be considered for providing legal assistance to ensure their transit to mental health centres, homes and facilities nearer to their native place. This can be done with the involvement of SLSAs and DLSAs.

LEGAL SERVICES TO THE MENTALLY ILL AND MENTALLY DISABLED PERSONS WHO ARE WANDERING, HOMELESS AND DESTITUTES

Under the Mental Health Act, 1987, Section 23, the officer in charge of a police station can take or cause to be taken into protection a wandering mentally ill person or a dangerous mentally ill person within the limits of his station and produce such person before the Magistrate under Section 24 for passing reception orders authorizing the detention of the said person as an inpatient in a psychiatric hospital or psychiatric nursing home for purposes of treatment.

Similarly, under Section 25 , a police officer or a private person who has reason to believe that a mentally ill person within the limits of his station is not under proper care and control or is ill-treated or neglected by relatives or other the persons having charge of such mentally ill person, can report the matter before the Magistrate . The Magistrate can pass an order of reception or even fine the person who is responsible for neglecting the mentally ill.

In the case of the homeless or destitute mentally disabled person, ordinarily the matter must be reported to the Local Level Committee through a registered organization as prescribed under the National Trust For the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999 and Rules and Regulations thereunder. It is the Local Level Committee which would pass appropriate directions for the care of the neglected or destitute mentally disabled person.

Action to be taken by legal services institutions

- The legal services institutions must draw up a panel of sensitive and sensitized legal services lawyers to represent the best interests of the mentally ill person at the time of the production of the person under Section 24 or Section 25 of the Mental Health Act, 1987 and assist the Magistrate while passing an order that would be in the welfare of the mentally ill person.
- The legal services institutions must assist the police through its PLVs assigned to the police stations to refer the mentally disabled persons, who are neglected, homeless or destitute to the Local Level Committee set up under Section 13 of the National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999 so that orders such as the appointment of guardian, whether individual or institutional, for the care and rehabilitation of the mentally disabled person is ensured.

- Legal services institutions must devise sensitization programmes with the junction of mental health officials including doctors, police officials and judicial magistrates dealing with inquisition proceedings to evolve locally conducive mode to ensure that wandering mentally ill persons are identified and dealt with securing their human rights by obtaining appropriate judicial orders as may be found necessary in each case.

LEGAL SERVICES TO MENTALLY ILL AND MENTALLY DISABLED PERSONS DURING COURT PROCEEDINGS

The two statutes governing the rights of the mentally ill persons and the mentally disabled persons are The Mental Health Act 1987 and the National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999. Both entail a hearing before the passing of appropriate orders by the Magistrate or the Local Level Committee as the case may be. It is important that the legal services institutions participate in them through the PLVs or the Panel lawyers.

- It shall be the duty of the legal services institutions to depute its retainer/panel lawyer to the court where an application for reception orders has been moved or is under consideration under Section 19, 20, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27 or 28 of the Mental Health Act, 1987.
- The legal services institutions may request the Magistrates who deal with such applications to give notice to the legal services institutions in all cases, for protecting the interest of the mentally ill persons in relation to whom the application for reception or discharge order is being made.
- The retainer/panel lawyer shall gather the details of the circumstances and shall liaise with the relatives of the alleged mentally ill persons, doctors in the psychiatric hospitals or psychiatric nursing homes or any other competent person to ensure that the condition of the person against whom the

application for reception/discharge order has been made warrants such an order from the court.

- The legal services institutions having local jurisdiction shall keep a list of the mentally ill persons against whom reception orders have been passed by the courts and shall monitor the progress of treatment of the mentally ill persons in the psychiatric hospitals or psychiatric nursing homes where the mentally ill persons is detained as per the reception order.
- The legal services institutions shall bring to the notice of the Magistrate concerned about any cured mentally person remaining in the psychiatric hospitals or psychiatric nursing homes where such mentally ill person has been sent as per the reception order.
- The legal services institutions should through the PLVs/panel/retainer lawyers help the cured voluntary patients for moving requests for discharge under Section 18 or by an involuntary patient under Section 19.
- The legal services institutions should through the clinics or as part of the Board of Visitors always keep track of admissions under Section 19 (1) of the Act so that detention beyond the period of the first ninety days is only on the orders of the court.
- The legal services institutions shall also keep track of cases under Section 20 of the Act, so that no cured patient is allowed to remain in the psychiatric hospital, home or facility by default. They must move applications for discharge as soon as the patient is cured.
- The legal services institutions shall also keep track of cases under Section 23 read with Section 25 of the Act, in relation to wandering or destitute mentally ill persons, so that the requirements under Section 28 of the Act, of a ten day review by the Magistrate of the need to keep a person under observation is strictly complied with and no person is detained longer than needed for the issuance of the certificate of mental illness under Section 24 (2) (a) of the Act.

- The legal services institutions through their legal services clinics and PLVs and panel/retainer lawyers should keep track of discharge of patients and wherever necessary should aid and assist the patient to move the application for discharge to the medical officer in charge or to the court which had passed the reception orders.
- The legal services clinics and PLVs and panel/retainer lawyers should also render assistance to inpatients to obtain leave of absence as provided under Section 45 and Section 46 of the Act. They should also assist the filing of appeals as provided for under Section 49 of the Act.
- The legal services institutions shall also participate in inquisition proceedings under Section 50 of the Act to protect the interests of the mentally ill person. A request must be made to the District Judge to issue notice to the legal services institution whenever an application under Section 50 comes before it.
- Where an alleged mentally ill person is possessed of property and if no persons mentioned in Clauses (a) to (d) of Sub-section (1) of Section 50 of Mental Health Act is coming forward with an application for holding judicial inquisition under Chapter VI of the Mental Health Act, the legal services institutions shall take appropriate steps for initiating judicial inquisition regarding the mental condition of the alleged mentally ill persons, custody of his/her person and management of his/her property. For this purpose the Legal Services Institutions may contact any of the aforesaid persons referred to in Clauses (a) to (d) of Sub-section (1) of Section 50 of Mental Health Act, 1987 in writing and may also take up the matter with the Advocate General of the State or with the Collector of the appropriate District in terms of Clause (d) of Sub-section (1) of section 50 of that Act. Legal Services institutions must extend legal aid to the mentally ill persons involved in such matters by providing effective assistance as may be appropriate and requested for by the Collector concerned to aid and assist in preparing and processing such proceedings.

- The legal services institutions should follow up every case where a guardian of the person is appointed under Section 53 and /or the manager of the property has been appointed under Section 54 or an order of maintenance has been passed under Section 71 and Section 79 of the Act and take every step to protect the interests of the mentally ill person.
- The legal services institutions should render all help to pursue appeals as provided under Section 76 of the Act.
- The legal services institutions should through the legal services clinics and PLVs and through visits including as Member of the Board of Visitors that there are no transgression of the human rights of the inmates and whenever such transgressions are noticed, shall bring it to the notice of the High Court.
- As the National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act 1999, is a comprehensive Act to provide for the care of the mentally disabled, including assistance in care to parents of the mentally disabled and also for arranging the care and finances of the mentally disabled after the death of the parents through appointment of guardians, it is important that legal services institutions inform the public of the Act and further help them to benefit from it. The PLVs and the legal services clinics should come to the assistance of the mentally disabled and their families in the matter of appointment of guardians.
- Legal services institutions shall come to the help of mentally ill and the mentally disabled in protecting their rights of inheritance, owning properties and enjoying financial rights. The persons with mental illness or mental disability have rights with others to inherit property, both movable as well as immovable, and also have a right to control their financial affairs and have access to bank loans, mortgages and other forms of financial credit, which can be

accessed by them personally or through a support person who has no interest in conflict to the person with mental illness or mental disability. Legal services institutions should render all legal help in realizing this.

- Legal services institutions shall assist the mentally disabled for obtaining all benefits under The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995.
- The legal services institutions shall find out the different beneficial schemes for the mentally disabled and their families. The legal services institutions shall assist the mentally disabled and their families to avail the benefits under such schemes.

AWARENESS AND SENSITISATION PROGRAMME

- The legal services institutions shall organize awareness programmes especially in rural areas, to educate people that mental illness is curable and there is no stigma attached to mental illness or mental disabilities.
- The legal services institutions should explain the need for equal treatment of mentally ill with other persons in the society. In such special legal awareness camps the presence of psychiatrists, lawyers and social workers can help the participants to clear their doubts and misconception about mental illness and mental disabilities.
- The legal services lawyer in such camps may educate the public and families on the property and other legal rights and the other provisions of law relating to the mentally ill and mentally disabled persons.
- The State Legal Services Authority / District Legal Services Authority may organize training programmes in association with

the Judicial Academy to sensitize the judicial officers about the socio-legal problems faced by the mentally ill and mentally disabled persons, their parents, relatives and family members.

- Similar programmes may be organized with the help of the bar associations to sensitize the panel lawyers and the other members of the legal profession.

The legal services institutions shall co-ordinate with NGOs and other volunteer social organizations for dealing with the issues relating to mentally ill and mentally disabled persons.
