

AFMS Launches India's First AI-Driven Community Screening Programme for Diabetic Retinopathy

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The Armed Forces Medical Services (AFMS), in collaboration with the Dr. Rajendra Prasad Centre for Ophthalmic Sciences (RPC), AIIMS, and the eHealth AI Unit of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW), has launched India's first Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven community screening programme for Diabetic Retinopathy (DR) on December 16, 2025 in New Delhi. The initiative marks a significant step towards strengthening early detection of diabetic eye disease and building a real-time national health intelligence framework.

The programme was inaugurated at Army Hospital (Research & Referral), New Delhi, by Director General Armed Forces Medical Services Surgeon Vice Admiral Arti Sarin along with Chief, Dr. Rajendra Prasad Centre for Ophthalmic Sciences Prof Radhika Tandon. The collaboration brings together the clinical reach of AFMS, academic leadership of AIIMS and digital innovation capabilities of MoHFW to address a major public health challenge.

Anchored by MadhuNetrAI, the programme is a web-based Artificial Intelligence tool developed by the Dr. Rajendra Prasad Centre for Ophthalmic Sciences (RPC). The platform facilitates automated screening, grading and triaging of retinal images captured using handheld fundus cameras, enabling trained Medical Officers, Nursing Staff and healthcare assistants to undertake community-level screening. The system also generates real-time data on disease prevalence and geographic distribution to support evidence-based planning and policy formulation.

As part of the pilot phase, the Armed Forces Medical Services (AFMS) will implement the initiative at seven locations—Pune, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Dharamshala, Gaya, Jorhat and Kochi—covering metropolitan, rural, hilly, coastal and remote regions. Personnel from each site will undergo intensive training at RPC, AIIMS, followed by large-scale community screening.

Patients identified with Diabetic Retinopathy will be referred for optimal diabetic management, while cases of vision-threatening Diabetic Retinopathy will be referred to vitreo-retina specialists at designated District Hospitals. District Health Administrations will coordinate referral mechanisms and integrate DR management within existing non-communicable disease programmes to ensure continuity of care.

A Compendium detailing the methodology and operational guidelines of the programme was released at the launch. The contribution of HOD & Consultant Ophthalmology, Army Hospital (R&R) Brig S K Mishra, in establishing the collaboration was acknowledged. The initiative is envisaged as a scalable and replicable model, demonstrating effective integration of AI-enabled solutions into public health systems through the combined efforts of AFMS, AIIMS and the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.



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