

Guest Editorial

# A United Front for Rabies Elimination from India – Advancing One Health Through Collaboration

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## A B S T R A C T

Rabies continues to be a significant public health threat in India, claiming thousands of lives annually—most of them preventable. We now advance into an era of integrated health systems and evidence-based interventions that, of late, have become a reality with the expanding laboratory infrastructures. It becomes increasingly clear that the path to eliminating rabies lies not in isolated action, not in the functioning of professionals in ‘silos’, but in coordinated, One Health-driven efforts involving human health, animal health, and environmental sectors.

The One Health approach emphasises the interconnectedness of humans, animals, and ecosystems. Rabies, a quintessential zoonosis, embodies this linkage. It is imperative that all stakeholders—medical professionals, veterinary experts, animal welfare organisations, civic bodies, forest departments, academia, and the community—come together in a synergistic manner. This collaboration must be rooted in mutual respect and clarity of mandate—avoiding duplication while complementing each other’s strengths.

Institutions like the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) have already paved the way by supporting both medical and veterinary diagnostic laboratories in India. This model of inclusive support is vital, particularly for developing early detection and response mechanisms across species. In this context, veterinary labs play a crucial role in rabies surveillance and are being equally empowered.

To address the challenge of rabies in free-roaming dog populations, especially in urban and peri-urban areas, we must move beyond conventional capture-vaccinate-release (CVR) models. A multipronged strategy is essential—leveraging technology, trained manpower, animal behaviour science, and humane containment tools. Additionally, oral rabies vaccines (ORV) have emerged globally as game-changers for hard-to-reach dog populations. Their strategic introduction in India, of course without compromising its safety and potency, can vastly improve coverage and reduce the reservoir of infection. Initiatives have already been made in India for its development.

Parallely, wildlife-associated rabies represents a hidden but growing risk, especially in forest-fringe villages. In this context, the forest sector’s active involvement becomes essential—to monitor, report,

and mitigate spillover risks from wild carnivores to domestic animals and humans.

On the diagnostic front, India must develop indigenous, high-quality rabies immunodiagnosics, ensuring they are affordable, accessible, user-friendly, and validated for both veterinary and human health use. Strengthening our domestic innovation ecosystem will enhance disease detection and reduce dependence on costly imports.

A core component of rabies prevention lies in public awareness and responsible behaviour. This includes training dog feeders to follow designated feeding norms to avoid congregation of dogs in public spaces. Equally, the public must be sensitised on dos and don'ts in case of dog bites and the importance of timely post-exposure prophylaxis.

Rural India, often left behind in health campaigns, must be brought to the forefront. This means ensuring availability of vaccines and rabies immunoglobulin (RIGs) in primary health centres and dispensaries, not just urban hospitals. However, suitable guidelines have to be evolved for post-exposure prophylaxis in case of animals. Moreover, regular capacity-building programmes for medical and veterinary professionals will keep frontline responders updated with the latest tools and guidelines.

Lastly, to sustain and scale these efforts, we must actively engage corporates through CSR funding. Rabies elimination is a cause that resonates deeply with social responsibility and public welfare, and corporates can significantly bolster outreach, infrastructure, and innovation.

The Association for Prevention and Control of Rabies in India (APCRI) stands at a critical juncture—uniquely positioned to lead these integrated efforts. With its network of experts in both veterinary and medical sectors, institutional credibility, and rich experience of mentors and senior members, APCRI has been and still can serve as the national anchor in orchestrating rabies elimination activities under the one health framework. Whether it's policy advocacy, technical training, innovation support, or multi-sectoral coordination, APCRI can be the unifying force that India needs, our country needs!

Let this editorial be a call: rabies can be eliminated. The tools exist. What we need now is intent, coordination, and collective action. Together, with APCRI along with other organisations at the helm, we can envision and realise a Rabies-Free India – an “unshakeable hope”.