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"Healthcare products used and sold in senior care operate in a regulatory grey zone"

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Indiaâ??s ageing population is set to reach 346 million by 2050, and families are increasingly relying on care homes and memory care facilities to support elderly loved onesâ??particularly those with conditions like dementia and Alzheimerâ??s. But behind this growth lies a stark reality: the sector remains largely unregulated, leaving seniors vulnerable to inconsistent standards, safety risks, and inadequate care. Prem Singh Rathore, Chief Quality Officer at Antara Senior Care spoke to BioSpectrum about the urgent need for regulations and benchmarks in Indiaâ??s fast-growing senior living and memory care sector.



What are the current regulations under which senior care facilities currently operate?

At present, India does not have a unified regulatory framework dedicated specifically to senior living or elder care. Instead, operators in this space are required to comply with multiple regulations drawn from other sectors—none of which are tailored to the unique needs of senior citizens. From a real estate standpoint, senior living communities must adhere to general building codes and fall under the ambit of RERA and local development authorities. On the healthcare front, facilities providing medical services must comply with various state-specific clinical guidelines, which can vary widely and often lack clarity for integrated care models. Then there's the hospitality element, which adds another layer of operational compliance typically seen in serviced residences or hospitality environments. This fragmented approach makes it challenging to deliver the kind of standardised, person-centric care that seniors deserve.

Beyond services and facilities, the products used and sold in senior care (such as walkers, BP monitors, pulse oximeters, and nutritional supplements) also operate in a regulatory grey zone. While some of these are covered under existing frameworks—like CDSCO for medical devices or FSSAI for nutraceuticals—many others face no clear scrutiny. Critically, there is no mandate for these products to be designed with seniors in mind, nor are there requirements for usability studies, clinical trials, or age-appropriate design validation. This raises the question: Should India consider establishing a regulatory or certification body focused specifically on products and services for seniors? A framework like this—possibly akin to a "senior care certified" standard—could help ensure safety, appropriateness, and quality, while also fostering trust and innovation in the sector.

At Antara, this gap has led us to develop our own internal benchmarks and quality standards—drawing from best practices internationally and across healthcare, hospitality, and real estate—to ensure consistency, dignity, and safety in our services. However, the absence of a dedicated, nationwide regulatory body for senior care continues to be a significant barrier to the sector's growth and accountability.

Are there any safeguards in place for senior care in India?

Today, senior care in India sits at the intersection of real estate, healthcare, and hospitality—but there is no integrated regulatory framework that specifically governs this unique blend. As a result, safeguards are fragmented, with each vertical bringing in its own set of standards and compliance requirements.

From a real estate perspective, safeguards relate to transparency in what is promised and delivered—this includes legal documentation, quality of construction, and alignment with RERA norms. In healthcare, especially given the vulnerability of the elderly population, the emphasis is on infection control, medication management, clinical protocols, and preventing abuse or neglect. While hospitality isn't directly regulated in the senior care context, it plays a key role in service delivery—where consistency, dignity, and long-term care commitments are crucial. Unlike traditional hospitality, where stays are short-term, senior care involves lifetime engagement, so escalation processes, grievance redressal, and service assurance take on added significance.

To truly safeguard seniors, there is an urgent need to standardise four core pillars in this sector:

1. Clinical governance – Ensuring medical safety, care protocols, and staff competency.
2. Customer-centric practices – Transparency, empathy, and delivering on service promises.
3. Safety and infrastructure – Secure, accessible environments tailored for ageing needs.
4. Emotional wellbeing – Structured programs and systems that address social connection, purpose, and mental health.

At Antara, we've taken it upon ourselves to build internal benchmarks around these four pillars in the absence of a national framework—because for a sector these critical, piecemeal safeguards simply aren't enough.

Why is it crucial to have standardisation for senior care facilities in India?

It's a matter of urgent necessity. The senior care sector in India is expanding rapidly – projected to reach $21.76 billion by 2031 - but without standardisation, it risks becoming fragmented, inconsistent, and in many cases, unsafe. At the moment, anyone can enter the space, regardless of qualifications, training, or understanding of what elderly care truly entails. This opens the door to human negligence, poor service delivery, and a breakdown of trust at every level.

For consumers, standardisation is about trust and transparency—it gives families peace of mind that their loved ones are in capable, accountable hands. For operators, it creates a clear benchmark of what is expected, helping define minimum service levels, infrastructure norms, and clinical safety protocols. If you're in this sector, you should be held to those standards.

For the workforce, particularly caregivers, nurses, and service staff, a standardised framework provides recognition, structure, and a defined path for career growth. It professionalises the sector and brings dignity to the work. And at a societal level, it assures people that their parents and elders are safe, protected from being preyed upon in moments of vulnerability.

Ultimately, standardisation is about creating clarity for all stakeholders—consumers, providers, employees, and regulators. It's the foundation for a new era of senior living in India—one that is organised, ethical, compassionate, and scalable.

Have you reached out to policymakers with concrete suggestions?

Yes, and it's something we're deeply proud of. At Antara, we've consistently worked not just as operators, but as sector enablers—actively engaging with industry bodies, accreditation councils, and policymakers to lay the groundwork for standardisation in senior care.

1. **Collaborating with Industry Bodies:**
   We've played an active role in working with the Association of Senior Living India (ASLI) to develop formal care standards. For instance, we collaborated with ASLI and the Health and Care Community of India to draft the HCCCA standards for memory care homes. These are scheduled to be launched by the end of this month, and Antara served as the pilot organisation—helping design the standards and undergoing the initial assessment to validate them.
2. **Shaping Accreditation Frameworks:**
   We've also worked closely with NABH (National Accreditation Board for Hospitals & Healthcare Providers) to contribute to the development of care home standards, which were officially launched last year. Antara was proud to be the first facility in the country to receive NABH accreditation in the senior care segment. In parallel, we've collaborated with Quality and Accreditation Institute (QAI) to put together an alternate set of standards for care homes, strengthening the framework across the board.
3. **Engaging with Policymakers:**
   On the policy front, Antara has participated in submitting minimum care standards for dementia to the Ministry of Social Justice, working alongside other key stakeholders in the dementia care ecosystem. We've also formally written to NITI Aayog, advocating for a unified regulatory framework for senior care—highlighting the need to treat it as a standalone

industry.

In terms of governance, we strongly believe in a tiered model: beginning with self-declaration, moving to third-party accreditation, and ultimately leading to a central regulatory body under the Ministry or NITI Aayog. This multi-level approach ensures accountability, scalability, and above all, the safety and dignity of India's senior population.

What standards followed at Antara make it different from other senior living facilities?

At Antara, our commitment to quality and integrity is deeply rooted in the Max Group's legacy of healthcare and service excellence. One of the clearest differentiators is that Antara's Gurugram Memory Care Home is the first and only NABH-accredited facility of its kind in India. For us, seeking independent validation of our care protocols was a natural step. Accreditation by NABH reflects not only clinical rigour but also a strong governance framework that ensures we consistently deliver what we promise—whether in terms of safety, transparency, service standards, or patient outcomes.

Our governance model is designed to hold us accountable both clinically and operationally. All services are guided by over 800 Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) across our senior care ecosystem, including more than 200 SOPs dedicated specifically to our care home. These are not just policy documents—they are living standards. We review them regularly, audit them frequently, and improve them continually based on internal assessments and international best practices.

What truly sets Antara apart is our multi-layered monitoring system. Every process is checked at multiple levels—first by the process owner, then by internal quality teams, and finally through independent assessments conducted by external experts. These evaluations go beyond clinical aspects to cover critical areas like infrastructure safety and emergency preparedness. This means governance at Antara isn't just a checklist—it's a day-to-day operational culture.

Another standout feature is our commitment to listening to our residents and families. Antara has embedded regular "Voice of Customer" assessments into our operating rhythm. We proactively gather feedback through 11 structured channels, using that insight to refine services and close gaps in real time.

Internationally, we are constantly exploring global standards and best practices that can be adapted to the Indian context. Our commitment to learning and evolving has also received significant international recognition, reinforcing our leadership in redefining senior care in India. We were recently honoured as the 'Operator of the Year – Senior Living' at the prestigious 13th Asia Pacific Eldercare Innovation Awards 2025, part of the World Ageing Festival. This accolade placed us alongside leading organisations from Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and Hong Kong—marking not just a proud moment, but a strong validation of our philosophy: to continuously learn, embrace global excellence, and tailor it meaningfully for India's ageing population.

Internally, we continue to drive innovation through dedicated forums that track global best practices, explore new engagement models, and constantly evolve to meet the needs of India's ageing population.