

## Expanding Universal Health Coverage

Manisha Verma



### NATIONAL HEALTH POLICY 2017 TOWARDS A HEALTHY TOMORROW

*There has been a sharpened focus towards providing affordable, accessible quality healthcare through various strategic interventions. These have covered a whole gamut of health services, manpower strengthening initiatives and steps to meet infrastructure demands. The efforts are in the direction of achieving Swastha Bharat, Samruddh Bharat*

The past four years have seen immense strides in the health scenario of the country. Be it policy changes, new programs or schemes, be it a financial push or global goals, considerable achievements in each facet of healthcare have been made. The Government is committed to the holistic development and thus health has been a focus area under its 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' mandate. The mandate of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) is to ensure that the health services reach the most vulnerable and the unserved populations. To fulfil this, the Ministry has taken up initiatives to ensure and expand Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

On the policy front, one of the significant steps has been the announcement of the National Health Policy 2017, after a gap of 15 years, to address the current and emerging challenges necessitated by the changing socio-economic and epidemiological landscapes of the country. While the Policy touched all components of healthcare in the country, it has brought focus to preventive and promotive health, primary health care and ensuring access, affordability and quality of health services. The other policy initiatives have been the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, HIV and AIDS (Prevention and Control) Act- 2017 and amendment of the Indian Medical

Council Act, 1956 for a uniform entrance examination for admission to all medical seats in the country. For the first time under National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), there is a uniform entrance examination across the country including private colleges and deemed universities. Also, annual sanctioned intake capacity has been increased from 3 per cent to 5 per cent for persons with benchmark disabilities in accordance with the provisions of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, based on the merit list of National Eligibility-Cum-Entrance Test for admission to Medical Courses.

Another landmark initiative to expand the universal health coverage across the country is- *Ayushman Bharat*. With its two components viz. Comprehensive Primary Health Care (CPHC) through 1.5 lakh Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs) and the National Health Protection Mission (NHPM), it is a huge step towards UHC. The Prime Minister launched the HWCs at Jangla, district Bijapur (Chhattisgarh) on April 14, 2018 embarking India on its journey towards UHC. The NHPM is poised to be the largest public funded health insurance scheme in the world. It will cater to the unmet needs of the population which remained hidden due to lack of financial resources. It aims to protect the poorest from catastrophic healthcare spending. Health insurance cover of Rs. 5,00,000/- per family/

The author is Director, Media and Communication, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India.

per year will be provided to 50 crore people (from about 10 crore families). This shall benefit nearly 40 per cent of the population, covering almost all secondary and many tertiary hospitalizations.

The Health Ministry has been persistently working on ensuring accessibility, affordability and quality of health services with special focus on reducing the Out Of Pocket Expenditures (OOPE) of the beneficiary. Under the flagship program National Health Mission (NHM), free essential drugs and diagnostics are provided at all public facilities across 29 States/UTs through the Free Drugs and Diagnostics program. Another innovative initiative is the Affordable Medicines and Reliable Implants For Treatment (AMRIT). Through 124 AMRIT Pharmacies spreads across 22 States, more than 5200 drugs (including cardiovascular, cancer, diabetes, stents, etc), implants, surgical disposables and other consumables are sold at a significant discount of up to 50 per cent on market rates. Drugs having MRP Value of Rs. 566.34 Crores have been dispensed at Rs. 254.36 Crores, resulting in saving of Rs. 311.99 Crores to the patients. The Pradhan Mantri National Dialysis Program (PM-NDP) has served 2,37,139 patients, conducted 22,84,353 free dialysis session through the 497 dialysis operational units/centres and 3330 total operational dialysis machines under it.

Also, as part of its maternal health programs, 388.65 lakhs mothers have been benefitted under the Janani Sishu Yojana (JSY) with an expenditure of Rs. 6485.17 crore. This has brought the institutional delivery in the country to 78.9 per cent (NFHS-4, 2015-16) from 47 per cent (DLHS-3, 2007-08). The new program Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan has helped identify more than 6 lakh high-risk pregnancies through more than 1.16 crore antenatal check-ups. Another new initiative has been LaQshya – 'Labour room Quality improvement Initiative' launched on December 11, 2017. It is a focused and targeted approach to strengthen

key processes related to the labour rooms and maternity operation theatres.

To ensure accessibility, under NHM, there are at present 1416 Mobile Medical units (MMUs) and 24276 ambulances (104/108) operational across the country. In order to strengthen the infrastructure of the public health systems, 7990 constructions and 9615 renovations have been completed, 73879 ASHAs selected across the country and provided 76283 health kits and 8149 AYUSH doctors have been engaged.

A singular and landmark achievement has been-India was validated for Maternal and Neonatal Tetanus Elimination (MNTE) in April 2015, much ahead of the global target date of December 2015. What is perhaps noteworthy is that India's Under-five Mortality Rate and Maternal Mortality Ratio declined at a higher pace than the global average. The percentage annual compound rate of decline in IMR during the period of the National Health Mission also accelerated from 2.1 per cent to 4.5 per cent. The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of the country has declined from 3.8 in 1990 to 2.9 in 2005 to 2.3 in the year 2013 and 24 States/UTs have already achieved replacement level of less than 2.1.

A significant accomplishment has been an expansion of the world's biggest public health intervention i.e. Universal Immunization Program (UIP), by launching five new vaccines (Measles-Rubella, Pneumococcal, Rotavirus, Inactivated Polio and Japanese Encephalitis), bringing total to 12 vaccines. Mission Indra dhanush (MI) was an important component of UIP and has completed its 4 phases in 528 districts. Under this Mission



mode scheme, 2.55 crore children have been vaccinated and 66.57 lakh fully immunized along with 68.78 lakh pregnant females being immunized. The first two phases of MI alone have led to an increase of 6.7 per cent in full immunization coverage in one year as compared to the 1 per cent annual increase in the past. Not only this, the target to achieve 90 per cent full immunization has been advanced by the Prime Minister in December 2019. To achieve this, the Intensified Mission Indra dhanush was launched by Prime Minister on October 8, 2017 at Vadnagar, Gujarat to be carried out in 121 districts, 17 urban areas and 52 districts of NE states (total 190 districts/urban areas across 24 states).

Not just immunization, MoHFW implements several programs to cater to each life stage of a child i.e. antenatal to adolescent and thereunto family planning and pregnancy. The MAA-Mother's Absolute Affection has enhanced the focus on breastfeeding. Through Intensified Diarrhoea Control Fortnight (IDCF) to combat mortality in children due to childhood diarrhoea, more than 22.3 crore under-5 children were reached since 2014. More than 97 Crore doses of Albendazole have been administered to children in the 1-19 year group, since 2014 as part of the National Deworming Day (NDD) to combat Soil-Transmitted Helminth (STH) infections. Also, 1150 Nutritional Rehabilitation Centres (NRCs) have been established for the management of severe acute malnutrition in under-5 children all across the country. The Rashtriya Bal

Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK) entails provision for child health screening and early intervention services through early detection and management of 4 Ds i.e. Defects at birth, Diseases, Deficiencies, Development delays and free management of 30 identified health conditions including surgery at tertiary health facilities. Until September 2017, a total of 1.55 Crore children have received treatment under the programme. With a high focus on the adolescent health, the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) was launched. Under this, 7516 Adolescent Friendly Health Clinics (AFHCs) have been established across the States to provide Adolescent Friendly Health Services. Approximately, 60 lakh adolescents receive counselling and clinical services at these clinics in a year.

The Ministry has accorded priority to population stabilisation. Mission Parivar Vikas programme was launched in 2016 for increasing access to contraceptives and family planning services in 146 high fertility districts with key initiatives. Under this, new contraceptives are made available till the Sub-Centre Level. As part of *NayiPehel*, family planning kit is provided by the ASHAs to the newlyweds. Saas Bahu Sammelan are held to encourage young married women and their mothers-in-law to freely discuss matters related to family planning and reproductive health. Beyond this program, three new contraceptives are added to the basket of family planning choices: injectable Contraceptive MPA (Medroxy Progesterone Acetate) under Antara Programme, Centch roman (Chhaya) and Progesterone Only Pills and injectable and Centchroman rolled out across the country.

To strengthen and augment the medial infrastructure in the country, under Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY), new AIIMS have been announced and medical colleges set up in various districts. The program aims at correcting regional imbalances in the availability of affordable/reliable tertiary healthcare

services. Since July 2014, 1675 hospital beds have been added in the six functional AIIMS (including 850 beds added in the last one year) and 2 new AIIMS announced for Jharkhand and Gujarat in 2017-18. Basket of services in six AIIMS have been expanded and presently, on an average, about 1663 major surgeries are getting performed every month. Also, construction of Super Specialty Block in four GMCs completed, adding up to 902 hospital beds, six Super Specialty Departments and three Trauma Centres and Cabinet approval obtained for 13 more GMC up-gradation projects. In the sphere of medical education, total 92 Medical College (46 Govt. and 46 Pvt.) have been set up in the last four years. This has resulted in an increase of 15354 MBBS seats (6519 in Government Colleges and 8835 in Private Colleges) and total 12646 PG Seats (Broad and Super Specialty Course) in last four years.

The Prime Minister has announced the achievement of a TB Free India by 2025. In order to make this a reality, as part of Revised National Tuberculosis Control Program (RNTCP), treatment for drug-sensitive TB is provided through a network of more than 400,000 DOT Centres, diagnosis of drug-resistant TB drug susceptibility testing at 74 culture and drug susceptibility testing (C-DST) laboratories. Also, the steps include quality diagnosis through more than 14000 designated microscopy centres and house to house screening of TB symptoms under Active Case Finding. Acknowledging that nutrition plays a very crucial role in the treatment of TB patients, the Government has approved Rs. 500 per month for nutritional support to all TB patients for the duration of TB treatment through DBT (as announced in Union Budget 2018-19).

As a visionary step, under the National AIDS Control Program (NACP), Test and Treat Policy has been



rolled out. It covers all patients with Anti Retro Viral (ARV) irrespective of CD count or clinical stage. This has brought more than 1 lakh additional HIV infected people under the ambit of ARV treatment. This also means that more than 11.75 lakh people infected with HIV are on ARV treatment; 54 per cent higher than the March '14.

The NHP 2017 clearly states tapping of IT for healthcare, and MoHFW has several IT initiatives including development of "inter-operable Electronic Health Records (EHR) system, telemedicine services, public health IT solutions (Mother and Child Tracking System (MCTS) / Reproductive Child Health (RCH) application, Kilkari App, Mobile Academy, ANM on Line (ANMOL), Drugs and Vaccines Distribution Management System (DVDMS) ('e-Aushadhi'), TB Patient Monitoring System "Nikshay", SUGAM by Central Drugs Standards Control Organisation (CDSCO) and eRaktKosh etc.) and web portals and mobile applications (National Health Portal (NHP), PMSMA Portal, MeraAspataal (My Hospital), mDiabetes Program, India Fights Dengue App etc.)

There has been a sharpened focus towards providing affordable, accessible quality healthcare through various strategic interventions. These have covered a whole gamut of health services, manpower strengthening initiatives and steps to meet infrastructure demands. The efforts are in the direction of achieving *Swastha Bharat, Samruddh Bharat*. □

(E-mail: [pibhealth@gmail.com](mailto:pibhealth@gmail.com))