

# INDIA FACING CRITICAL SHORTAGE OF HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS: WHO

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

Despite the health sector employing five million workers in India it continues to have low density of health professionals with figures for the country being lower than those of Sri Lanka, China, Thailand, United Kingdom and Brazil, according to a World Health Organisation database. This workforce statistic has put the country into the “critical shortage of healthcare providers” category. Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan are the worst hit while Delhi, Kerala, Punjab and Gujarat compare favourably.

“Southeast Asia needs a 50% increase in healthcare manpower to achieve universal health coverage by 2030. India faces the problem of acute shortages and inequitable distributions of skilled health workers as have many other low- and middle-income countries,” said K. Srinath Reddy, president, Public Health Foundation of India.

He said that the need of the hour is to design courses for different categories of non-physician care providers. Competencies (and not qualification alone) should be valued and reform must be brought in regulatory structures to provide flexibility for innovations, he added.

“Data on the prevalence of occupational vacancies in the health care system in India overall is scarce. Government statistics for 2008, based on vacancies in sanctioned posts showed 18% of primary health centres were without a doctor, about 38% were without a laboratory technician and 16% were without a pharmacist,” says a paper titled ‘Forecasting the future need and gaps in requirements for public health professionals in India upto 2026’ published in the *WHO South-East Asia Journal of Public Health*.

The health workforce in India comprises broadly eight categories, namely: doctors (allopathic, alternative medicine); nursing and midwifery professionals; public health professionals (medical, non-medical); pharmacists; dentists; paramedical workers (allied health professionals); grass-root workers (frontline workers); and support staff.

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