

CENTRE TO SET UP TWO MOBILE HOSPITALS FOR BETTER HEALTHCARE RESPONSE

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

NEW DELHI : In a first in Asia, India will develop container-based mobile hospitals that can be moved by rail or air to address a health emergency, Union minister of health and family welfare Mansukh Mandaviya said on Tuesday.

The provision will be under the Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission that was launched by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday. "For the first time in Asia, two container-based hospitals with comprehensive medical facilities will be kept ready at all times, which can be swiftly mobilized by rail or air to respond to any calamity or disaster in the country," said Mandaviya.

"We are working with a 'saturation approach' with the block, district, state and national levels seamlessly connected for affordable and quality healthcare," he said. With an outlay of 64,180 crore, Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission, announced in the Budget 2021-22, is said to be the largest pan-India health infrastructure scheme that aims to provide a much-needed fillip to India's capacity to address emergent public health issues.

"This (scheme) will bring about a paradigm shift in India's healthcare infrastructure and make it more resilient. The umbrella pan-India Ayushman Bharat will provide primary, secondary, tertiary, digital and resilient healthcare systems that will equip the country to face challenges of pandemics in the future," said the minister.

Ayushman Bharat-Health & Wellness Centres were launched in April 2018 followed by Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) in September 2018. The Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission was launched this year in September, while the pan-India health infrastructure strengthening scheme-PM Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission- was launched on Monday.

"These initiatives shall provide affordable, quality and accessible healthcare to all people. They will also enable citizens for universal access to basic diagnostic and treatment services and will take care closer to communities in both rural and urban areas, said Mandaviya. The government said that in order to ensure better primary healthcare facilities, 150,000 Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres are in line to be set up, of which around 79,000 are already functioning. In addition, work has started on ensuring that every district has at least one medical college with the government already sanctioning 157 medical colleges.

"This will also build a trained front line health workforce to respond to any public health emergency. The decision to expand the AIIMS network to 22 hospitals from the existing strength of seven is for safe, comprehensive, affordable and accessible healthcare for all," said the minister.

Speaking on India's strategy of turning the crisis into opportunity, Mandaviya said, "Covid-19 has provided us with an opportunity to boost healthcare facilities including laboratories, hospitals and diagnostic facilities at all the levels of healthcare."

Highlighting some of the key features of Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission, the Union health minister said that 134 different types of tests will be done for free at

the district level, which will not only save costs but also reduce unnecessary inconvenience for poor people.

The government said that Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission aims to produce robust outcomes in Public Health leapfrogging India to one of the most advanced countries in the world in terms of management of public health outbreaks.

The components, such as setting up of the National Platform for One Health, setting up a Division for Research on Disease Elimination Sciences & Health as a satellite centre of national Aids research institute, setting up of the Regional National Institute of Virology (NIV) , strengthening of existing national research institutions, the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and existing laboratory infrastructure, upgradation of labs and creation of additional BSL-3 facilities under the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the NCDC, will further strengthen the country's capacity to detect and diagnose new infections.

The planned interventions will also lead to availability of adequately trained manpower who can contribute to diagnosis and research on novel pathogens and biological threats, reducing dependence on foreign partners and laboratories, said the health minister.

“Development of Critical Care Hospital Blocks in 602 districts as proposed under the scheme, shall make such districts self-sufficient, to a large extent, in providing comprehensive treatment for infectious diseases without disruption to the other essential health services and also augment the critical care capacities in the public health facilities,” said Mandaviya.

Initiatives such as strengthening of points of entry will ring fence our borders against the import of new infectious diseases and pathogens. Health Emergency Operation Centres and the container-based mobile hospitals shall further build capacities for effective emergency response during such times, he said.

Setting up of national-, regional-, state-, district-, and block-level laboratories integrated into a network for surveillance functions, backed by a robust IT based reporting mechanism through the Integrated Health Information Platform (IHIP), shall lead to self-reliance for detection, prevention and containment of disease outbreak, he added.

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