

PREPARING FOR OUTBREAKS

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

Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare Mansukh Mandaviya (second from left) addresses a press conference on PM Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission in New Delhi on October 26, 2021. Union Minister of State for Health Bharati Pravin Pawar is to his left. | Photo Credit: [PTI](#)

[COVID-19](#) overburdened the country's health system and services. The early months of the outbreak were particularly taxing for the States with weaker health systems. The inability of the private sector to share the burden drove the point home that healthcare services cannot be left to independent forces.

The [Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission \(ABHIM\)](#) is another addition to the arsenal we have to prepare for such outbreaks in the future. This was launched with an outlay of 64,180 crore over a period of five years. In addition to the [National Health Mission](#), this scheme will work towards strengthening public health institutions and governance capacities for wide-ranging diagnostics and treatment, including critical care services. The latter goal would be met with the establishment of critical care hospital blocks in 12 central institutions such as the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, and in government medical colleges and district hospitals in 602 districts.

Centre to launch two mobile hospitals

The importance of laboratories and their lack of readiness during an outbreak in terms of having a robust surveillance system and diagnostic interface has never been more pronounced than in recent times. The government will be establishing integrated district public health labs in 730 districts to provide comprehensive laboratory services. The current labs for different programmes shall be integrated to deliver clinical, public health surveillance and diagnostic services for predicting outbreaks, epidemics, and more.

ABHIM will focus on supporting research on COVID-19 and other infectious diseases, including biomedical research to generate evidence to inform short-term and medium-term responses to such pandemics. The government also aims to develop a core capacity to deliver the 'one health' approach to prevent, detect, and respond to infectious disease outbreaks in humans and animals. The plan to achieve that bio-security preparedness and pandemic research strengthening would be realised via four regional National Institutes for Virology, the regional research platform for the World Health Organization Southeast Asia Region, and nine Biosafety Level III laboratories.

In India's endeavour to keep ahead of the infectious organisms that bring our life to a halt, expanding and building an IT-enabled disease surveillance system is on the cards too. A network of surveillance labs will be developed at the block, district, regional and national levels for detecting, investigating, preventing, and combating health emergencies and outbreaks.

Health benefit package under Ayushman Bharat revised

Surveillance will get a huge boost with 20 metropolitan surveillance units, five regional National Centre for Disease Control branches, and an integrated health promotion platform in all the States. The points of entry will be reinforced with 17 new points of entry health units upgrading 33 existing units. The upgraded and intensified system of surveillance will be in addition to a

state-of-the-art national digital health ecosystem for IT-enabled healthcare service delivery, for managing the core digital health data and for ensuring national portability in the provision of health services through a secure system of electronic health records. This will be based on international standards and easily accessible to citizens.

A major highlight of the current pandemic has been the requirement of local capacities in urban areas. The services from the existing urban primary health centres will be expanded to smaller units – Ayushman Bharat Urban Health and Wellness Centres and polyclinics or specialist clinics. The urban primary health centres will be established closer to the community to meet the needs of the urban population and polyclinics will guarantee care through improved access to expanded high-quality services and establish referral linkages.

Bharati Pravin Pawar is the Union Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare

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The Government's objection to the methodology of the Global Hunger Index is not based on facts

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