

PM Modi launches Ayushman Bharat Health Insurance for 70+ senior citizens

On 4th November 2024, Prime Minister Narendra Modi introduced the Ayushman Vaya Vandana (AVV) Card, expanding the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY) to provide Rs 5 lakh health insurance coverage to senior citizens aged 70 and above. This program aimed to provide cashless hospital treatment, allowing all eligible seniors, regardless of income level, to receive necessary medical care without financial stress. The scheme covered 1,929 medical procedures, including medication, diagnostics, and physician fees. It also enabled shared family coverage, allowing multiple elderly members in a household to utilize the Rs 5 lakh limit collectively.

To enroll, seniors were directed to download the Ayushman app, complete an e-KYC process, verify Aadhaar, and add eligible family members. Although beneficial, experts highlighted limitations, including a restricted network of empaneled hospitals and limited flexibility with policy terms. These limitations indicated that a personal health insurance plan would provide more comprehensive and customized coverage.

As of late September 2024, over 35 crore Ayushman cards had been issued under AB PM-JAY, and beneficiaries could access treatment immediately upon enrollment. The expansion was expected to aid 6 crore senior citizens across 4.5 crore households in India.





19th International Conference of Drug Regulatory Authorities

New Delhi, India | 14th – 18th October



19th International Conference of Drug Regulatory Authorities commences in India

On 14th October 2024, Union Health Minister J.P. Nadda announced that over 95% of drug regulatory processes in India had been digitized, enhancing transparency and fostering trust among stakeholders. Speaking at the 19th International Conference of Drug Regulatory Authorities organized by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) in New Delhi, Mr. JP Nadda highlighted the mandatory implementation of barcodes or QR codes on the top 300 drug brands and on all API packs, whether imported or domestically manufactured.

Mr. JP Nadda emphasized India's commitment to global health, stating that the country focused on "skill, speed, and scale" to meet the rising demand for pharmaceutical products while maintaining global quality standards. He asserted that India was prepared to tackle significant challenges, including antimicrobial resistance and ensuring equitable access to life-saving treatments.

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the WHO Director-General, praised India for hosting the conference, underscoring the importance of global collaboration in drug regulation amid contemporary challenges. Dr Saima Wazed, WHO's regional director for Southeast Asia, noted India's position as the largest provider of generic medicines and the third-largest pharmaceutical industry globally. The conference served as a platform for discussing lasting health solutions through international cooperation.



India creates indigenous hand-held X-Ray for TB screening

Dr Rajiv Bahl, Director General of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), highlighted significant advancements in public health during the 19th International Conference of Drug Regulatory Authorities (ICDRA) INDIA-2024 on 16th October 2024. He announced the development of a new handheld X-ray device for tuberculosis (TB) screening, created in partnership with IIT Kanpur. This indigenously produced device was priced at less than half the cost of imported versions, facilitating easier access to TB screening for vulnerable populations.

Mr Bahl also reported the creation of three testing kits for Mpox, with manufacturing support from three companies. He addressed the pressing issue of sickle cell disease, which affects over a million people in India. Following the launch of the National Sickle Cell Anaemia Elimination Mission by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, ICMR developed 18 low-cost testing kits for the disease, reducing the cost from ₹400 to just ₹30 per test.

Furthermore, Mr. Bahl discussed ongoing efforts in dengue prevention, mentioning that a dengue vaccine was expected to be launched pending successful phase three clinical trials. He anticipated results within a year, contingent on the findings of safety and efficacy. These initiatives underscored ICMR's commitment to improving public health outcomes in India.



1.5 lakh wellness centers to be established nationwide to prevent NCDs

On 20th October 2024, Union Minister Jitendra Singh announced the establishment of approximately 1.50 lakh Health and Wellness Centres across India, focusing on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes and hypertension. During a release of data from the “ICMR-India Diabetes (INDIAB) Study,” Mr. Singh highlighted the importance of a preventable healthcare ecosystem, credited to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s initiatives before the COVID-19 pandemic.

The INDIAB study revealed a diabetes prevalence of 18.9% in the Jammu region, with urban areas at 26.5% and rural areas at 14.5%, surpassing the national average. Mr. Singh emphasized the need for a multi-sectoral approach involving government and community efforts to address the rising cases of diabetes and other NCDs. He called the study a landmark effort that would aid in developing targeted interventions for diabetes prevention and management.

Mr. Singh also stressed the importance of early detection, particularly among pregnant women with diabetes, and urged that youth must be protected from this preventable disease. He recognized the potential of young people as key contributors to a developed India by 2047, asserting that their health should be a priority for all stakeholders.



Health Minister launches ₹9.9 crore medical facilities in Madurai

On 22nd October 2024, Minister for Health and Family Welfare of Tamil Nadu Ma Subramanian inaugurated several new facilities at Government Rajaji Hospital (GRH) and Usilampatti Government Hospital in Madurai with a combined investment of ₹9.9 crore. Key additions included a cath lab at GRH, established at a cost of ₹7.9 crore through CSR funds, enabling around 20 patients to undergo stent placements and angiography daily. An impulse oscillometry system, the first of its kind in South Tamil Nadu, was also launched for improved lung disease diagnosis.

Additionally, Mr. Subramanian unveiled a CSR-funded ambulance worth ₹21.9 lakh, a chapati-making machine for the GRH kitchen costing ₹4.5 lakh, and a ₹1 crore district public health laboratory at Usilampatti. He inspected the JICA loan-funded tower block operation theatre complex, which faced delays in full operationalization, but the sixth floor with seven operation theatres was set to open by November.

The minister announced plans for an IVF facility at GRH, pending an assessment of the existing unit's response in Chennai. Addressing drainage issues at GRH, he acknowledged the need for a new drainage system, with an estimated cost of ₹3.6 crore, and promised to coordinate with the Directorate of Medical Education to expedite the project. GRH dean Dr. L Arul Sundaresk Kumar and other officials were present at the inauguration.

IIT Delhi launches MS research in healthcare technology

On 23rd October 2024, IIT Delhi launched a specialized MS Research program in Healthcare Technology, addressing the increasing demand for innovation at the intersection of engineering and medicine. This program aims to equip students with the skills needed to develop advanced solutions in healthcare, from diagnostic tools to wearable devices and AI-driven applications for patient care.

Designed for engineers, researchers, and healthcare professionals, the MS program offers a curriculum that combines coursework with intensive research in healthcare challenges. Students will have access to state-of-the-art labs and collaborate with experts in medical technology, data science, and bioengineering.

By focusing on pressing healthcare issues and fostering cross-disciplinary expertise, IIT Delhi's program supports India's growing medical technology sector. Graduates are expected to play a key role in revolutionizing healthcare with innovations that improve diagnostics, treatments, and patient outcomes, contributing to the advancement of affordable, efficient healthcare solutions in India and globally.



Union Health Secretary underlines India's global leadership in healthcare at the Annual India Leadership Summit 2024

At the Annual India Leadership Summit 2024 on 15th October 2024, Union Health Secretary Punya Salila Srivastava spotlighted India's growing global leadership in healthcare. During her speech, the Health Secretary outlined India's contributions across key sectors, including pharmaceutical manufacturing, vaccine production, and healthcare reforms, highlighting the synergy between India and the US in disease surveillance, biomedical research, and pandemic preparedness.

Srivastava noted India's exceptional role as a pharmaceutical powerhouse, the third-largest producer and leading supplier of generic medicines globally. She highlighted the substantial savings that Indian pharmaceutical companies have provided to healthcare systems worldwide, particularly in the US.

The Union Health Secretary underscored India's dominance in vaccine production, with 50% of the world's vaccines manufactured in the country.



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