



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**CHALLENGES OF UNIVERSAL
HEALTH COVERAGE (UHC)**

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Context

- **Universal Health Coverage (UHC)** is a critical goal for India, however, achieving UHC presents **a complex array of challenges** due to the diverse and multifaceted nature of the country's healthcare landscape.

About Universal health coverage (UHC)

- It is a **global health objective** that aims to ensure all people have access to the health services they need **without suffering financial hardship**.
- It includes a **full range of essential health services**, from health promotion and prevention to treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care.
- Achieving UHC is a critical component of the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs-3)** which focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages.

Key Components of UHC

- **Availability:** Ensuring that health services are available in sufficient quantity.
- **Accessibility:** Making sure that health services are accessible to everyone, regardless of their location or socio-economic status.
- **Affordability:** Providing health services without causing financial hardship.
- **Quality:** Ensuring that health services are of high quality and meet the needs of the population.

Health and Constitution of India

- Public Health and Sanitation, Hospitals, and Dispensaries fall under the **State List (List II, Schedule VII)**.
- Family Welfare and Population Control, Medical Education, Prevention of Food Adulteration, and Quality Control in the Manufacture of Drugs are included in the **Concurrent List (List III, Schedule VII)**.
- The **Central Council of Health and Family Welfare** (set up under Article 263 of the Constitution) enables consideration and recommendation of broad lines of policy in regard to matters concerning health and family welfare.

Right to Health

- While the Constitution of India does not explicitly mention the right to health, it has been interpreted by the judiciary to be an **integral part of the right to life under Article 21**.

Current State of UHC in India

- The **National Health Policy 2017** articulates the goal of achieving the highest possible level of health and well-being for all citizens.
 - ♦ Despite this, disparities in healthcare access and quality persist across different states and regions.
- For instance, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu spend 3,829, 2,590, and 2,039 per capita respectively, while Uttar Pradesh and Bihar spend only 951 and 701.
 - ♦ It highlights the need for tailored UHC plans that consider the unique realities of each state.

Key Challenges in Achieving UHC in India

- **Diverse Health Systems:** India's health systems vary widely across states, reflecting different levels of development and healthcare infrastructure.
 - ♦ For instance, states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu have relatively advanced healthcare systems, while states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh lag behind in terms of healthcare expenditure and outcomes.

- **Inequities in Health Outcomes:** States with similar population sizes and health indicators can have vastly different healthcare outcomes. For example, teenage pregnancy rates and fertility rates vary significantly, impacting the overall health indicators.
 - ♦ For instance, West Bengal, despite having a low fertility rate, has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in the country.
- **High Out-of-Pocket Expenditure:** In states like **West Bengal (remains high at 67%)** and Andhra Pradesh, out-of-pocket expenses account for a significant portion of total health expenditure, indicating that increased government spending alone is not sufficient.
- **Systemic Challenges:** The **coexistence of multiple health system types** within the same state can complicate the implementation of a unified UHC plan.
 - ♦ Additionally, the varying levels of healthcare infrastructure and workforce across states further complicate efforts to provide equitable healthcare access.
- **Infrastructure Gaps:** India faces significant healthcare infrastructure deficits, particularly in rural areas.
 - ♦ Many regions lack adequate healthcare facilities, medical equipment, and essential medicines.
 - ♦ It is more pronounced in states with lower healthcare spending.
- **Workforce Shortages:** There is a critical shortage of healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses, and allied health workers.
 - ♦ It is exacerbated by uneven distribution, with rural and remote areas being the most affected.
- **Policy and Governance Issues:** Effective implementation of UHC requires robust policy frameworks and governance structures.
 - ♦ However, challenges such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of coordination between different levels of government, and corruption can hinder progress.

Related Government Initiatives Achieving UHC in India

- **Ayushman Bharat:** It is aimed at providing health coverage to over 500 million people. It includes **two major components**:
 - ♦ **Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs):** These centres aim to provide comprehensive primary healthcare services, including preventive, promotive, rehabilitative, and curative care.
 - ♦ **Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY):** It provides health insurance coverage of up to 5 lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization.
- **Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission (PM-ABHIM):** Launched to strengthen primary, secondary, and tertiary healthcare systems, this mission aims to develop capacities to detect and cure new and emerging diseases.
- **National Health Mission (NHM):** It includes the **National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and the National Urban Health Mission (NUHM)**, which aims to provide equitable, affordable, and quality healthcare services.
 - ♦ These missions focus on reducing maternal and child mortality, controlling communicable and non-communicable diseases, and strengthening healthcare infrastructure.
- **National Digital Health Mission (NDHM):** It aims to create a digital health ecosystem by providing a unique health ID to every citizen, enabling seamless access to health records and services.
- **Increased Public Health Expenditure:** The government aims to increase public health expenditure to **2.5% of GDP**, as outlined in the **National Health Policy 2017**.

Path Forward

- **Strengthening Primary Healthcare:** Investing in primary healthcare to ensure comprehensive and continuous care for all individuals.
- **Reducing Out-of-Pocket Expenditure:** Implementing policies to reduce the financial burden on individuals, such as expanding insurance coverage and subsidizing healthcare costs.
- **Addressing Regional Disparities:** Tailoring UHC plans to the specific needs of different states, considering their unique healthcare challenges and resource availability.

Conclusion

- Achieving universal health coverage in India requires a multifaceted approach that considers the diverse realities of each state.
- It involves not only increasing government health expenditure but also addressing systemic issues and health inequities.
- A tailored, region-specific strategy is essential to overcome the challenges and ensure that all Indians have access to quality healthcare without financial hardship.

Source: TH

Mains Practice Question

Discuss the major hurdles and potential solutions to achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in India. Analyze the role of public-private partnerships and technological advancements in addressing these challenges.

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