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The Lakshmi Mittal and Family
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REIMAGINING
INDIA'S
HEALTH SYSTEM
A Lancet Citizens' Commission

**The Lancet Citizens' Commission on
Reimagining India's Health System**
Newsletter

Dear Friends,

We are delighted to present to you the July edition of the monthly newsletter by the Lancet Citizens' Commission on Reimagining India's Health System. This month's newsletter covers critical health issues facing India, from debunking myths about population growth to examining the challenges of its vaccination programmes in protecting against rising health risks. Articles address the inadequacies in extending national health insurance to the elderly, the public health sector's paralysis, and a concerning 80% shortfall of specialist doctors in rural India. It also highlights staggering statistics, such as 10.4 lakh deaths due to antibiotic-resistant superbugs and the economic impact of suicide, costing Rs 1.4 lakh crore in 2019. Additionally, the newsletter explores new digital health platforms like MIDAS, aiming to revolutionize AI-enabled healthcare in India.

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Views & Opinions

Busting myths about India's population

growth

An effective media strategy can change social attitudes and promote a sustainable population policy. India's population has long been a subject rife with myths and misinformation, often exacerbated by a global narrative that pits growing numbers against limited resources. This narrative, bolstered by India's recent overtaking of China as the world's most populous country, has led to the widespread belief that India's burgeoning population is at the root of several pressing global issues, from resource scarcity to climate change, *writes Poonam Muttreja*.

India's vaccination programmes: Are we ready to protect our populations from growing health risks?

Earlier this month, India recorded its first confirmed case of mpox. A young man upon returning from a foreign country had to be admitted to Delhi's Lok Nayak Jan Hospital where he was treated for the viral disease. Mpox cases, caused by the monkeypox virus, have been on the rise globally in the past few weeks. On August 14, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared mpox a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) for the second time in the past two years, after a new strain of the virus – clade 1b – was identified in the Democratic Republic of Congo, *writes Garima Sadhwani*.

Why extending national health insurance scheme to elderly is not enough

The Centre's decision, last week, to extend the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) with a Rs 5 lakh top-up for all older adults aged above 70 years, not covered by other public health insurance schemes, is a step in the right direction. However, it's not a game-changer. The government claims that the move will benefit about 4.5 crore families. We have tried to analyse how far the proposed scheme goes in protecting households from impoverishment caused by catastrophic healthcare expenditures (CHE) and how many will benefit from it, *write Srinivas Goli, Kaustav Chakraborty and Jhumki Kundu*.

Policy paralysis, a weakened public health sector

The public health needs of a population are diverse and perception and prioritisation vary across the social strata. Public health policies are those decisions made by the government based on the resources available to address people's health needs. Public health needs include those

felt by people (felt needs) based on their lived experiences and those projected upon (projected needs) them by experts — the architects of public health policies. The recent Union Budget has been critiqued for its inadequate focus on the social sector, specifically the public health sector, *writes Mathew George*.

Rural India has an 80% shortfall of specialist doctors. MP, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu worst off

There is nearly 80 percent shortage of specialist doctors at community health centres (CHCs) across rural India, according to a new government report, indicating that the rising number of seats in medicine has hardly had any impact on specialised healthcare delivery beyond cities. Rural CHCs are 30-bed facilities below district hospitals and provide secondary-level healthcare services to approximately 1.6 lakh people on average, *writes Sami Sukanya Dutta*.

Up to 10.4 lakh deaths in India in 2019 due to antibiotic-resistant superbugs, says Lancet report

In 2019, between 3 and 10.4 lakh people in India died due to bacterial antimicrobial resistance (AMR), a condition in which pathogenic bacteria no longer respond to antibiotics, according to the new Global Research on Antimicrobial Resistance (GRAM) Project.The first analysis of the global burden of AMR, the project is a partnership between the University of Oxford and the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington, *writes Sami Sukanya Dutta*.

First count of suicide cost: Rs 1.4 lakh crore expenditure in 2019, nationwide study shows

Suicides in India cost the country over $16 billion (around ₹1,40,000 crore) in 2019, an amount higher than the Union government's current annual health budget, the first nationwide assessment of the economic burden of suicides has suggested. The assessment involving calculations to determine the monetary value of the years of life lost across states, age groups and gender has

also estimated that Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala accounted for the largest share, nearly 45 per cent of the total economic burden. Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Bengal make up the next three largest burdens, *writes G.S. Mudur*.

Resources

MIDAS: a new platform for quality-graded health data for AI-enabled healthcare in India

India is actively promoting a digital health ecosystem to support its quest for universal healthcare. Quality-graded health data can provide exceptional decision-making support in this endeavor. The biggest hurdle to developing artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled healthcare technologies in India is the availability of high-quality annotated data for South Asians, especially Indians, that can be used to train and validate AI applications, *write Dibyajyoti Maity, Rohit Satish, Dushyantsinh Anupsinh Jadeja, Raghu Dharmaraju, Vijay Chandru, Rajesh Sundaresan, Harpreet Singh & Debnath Pal*.

Leveraging digital health initiatives to enhance the effectiveness, equity and responsiveness of health systems

In August 2023, the G20 India presidency and the WHO announced a new Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH) at the Health Minister's Meeting of the G20 Summit.1 The GIDH initiative will operate to support the implementation of the Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020–2025 and will focus on developing global standards, best practices and resources to fast-track digital health system transformation globally, *writes Sumit Kane*.

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