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Role of the Government in Health

In a democracy, people expect the government to work for their welfare through the provision of essential services such as education, health, employment, housing, and infrastructure development like roads and electricity. This chapter examines the meanings and problems related to health and explores the government's role in addressing these issues.

What is Health?

Health is not merely the absence of illness or injury but encompasses a broader state of physical, mental, and social well-being. Factors such as access to clean drinking water, pollution-free environment, adequate nutrition, and living conditions significantly affect health. Mental health is equally important; being free from anxiety, fear, and mental strain contributes to overall health.

Healthcare in India

India has the largest number of medical colleges globally and produces over 30,000 doctors annually. However, most doctors reside in urban areas, limiting rural access to healthcare. The number of government hospitals has increased significantly from 2,717 in 1950 to 23,583 in 2017. Despite this growth, diseases like tuberculosis and malaria continue to cause high mortality and morbidity.

India has the largest number of medical colleges in the world and is among the largest producers of doctors. Approximately more than 30,000 new doctors qualify in every year.	Most doctors settle in urban areas. People in rural areas have to travel long distances to reach a doctor. The number of doctors with respect to the population much less in rural areas.
Healthcare facilities have grown substantially over the years. In 1950, there were only 2,717 government hospitals in India. In 1991, there were 11,174 hospitals. In 2017, the number grew to 23,583.	About five lakh people die from tuberculosis every year. This number is almost unchanged since Independence! Almost two million cases of malaria are reported every year and this number isn't decreasing.
India gets a large number of medical tourists from many countries. They come for treatment in some of the hospitals in India that compare with the best in the world.	We are not able to provide clean drinking water to all. 21 per cent of all communicable diseases are water borne. For example, diarrhoea, worms, hepatitis, etc.
India is the third largest producer of medicines in the world and is also a large exporter of medicines.	Half of all children in India do not get adequate food to eat and are undernourished.

India is also a major producer and exporter of medicines. However, about half of Indian children suffer from undernutrition, affecting their growth and health. Many communicable diseases in India are waterborne, and only 21% of the population has access to clean drinking water.

Exam Question

Q: Why is healthcare access limited in rural India despite the large number of doctors produced annually?

A: Most doctors live in urban areas, leading to fewer healthcare professionals in rural regions, which limits access to medical services for rural populations.

Public Healthcare Services

Public health services in India consist of a network of government-run health centres and hospitals covering rural and urban areas. At the village level, health centres staffed by nurses and health workers provide basic care under the supervision of doctors at Primary Health Centres (PHCs). District hospitals oversee these centres. Public healthcare aims to provide quality services free or at low cost, especially for the poor, and includes disease prevention campaigns.



A doctor in a rural health care centre giving medicines to a patient.

Exam Question

Q: What is the primary objective of public healthcare services?

A: To provide accessible, affordable, and quality healthcare to all citizens, especially the poor and disadvantaged, including preventive measures against diseases.

Private Healthcare Services

Private healthcare includes individual doctors' clinics, nursing homes, laboratories, and pharmacies not controlled by the government. Patients pay for every service, often at high costs. Private facilities are mostly concentrated in urban areas and include specialized services. Some private providers may encourage unnecessary treatments to increase earnings.



A post-operative room in a leading private hospital in Delhi.

Exam Question

Q: How do private healthcare services differ from public healthcare services?

A: Private healthcare services are owned and operated by individuals or companies, require payment for services, and are often concentrated in urban areas, unlike public services which are government-run and aim to provide affordable care.

Healthcare and Equality

In India, private healthcare services are increasing while public services lag, leading to high costs and limited access for many. Only about 20% of the population can afford all required medicines. Medical expenses often cause financial hardship, forcing many to borrow money

or sell possessions. Social factors such as gender and location also affect access to healthcare, with women and tribal populations facing additional barriers.



jan aushadhi
Quality Medicines At Affordable Prices for All

Jan Aushadhi Medical Stores

Daam kam, Dawai Uttam

Jan Aushadhi Medical Stores is a chain of medical stores initiated by the Central Government to offer quality generic medicines at much lower prices.

As a Consumer, you want...
Branded medicines at higher prices? Or Same generic medicines at lesser prices?

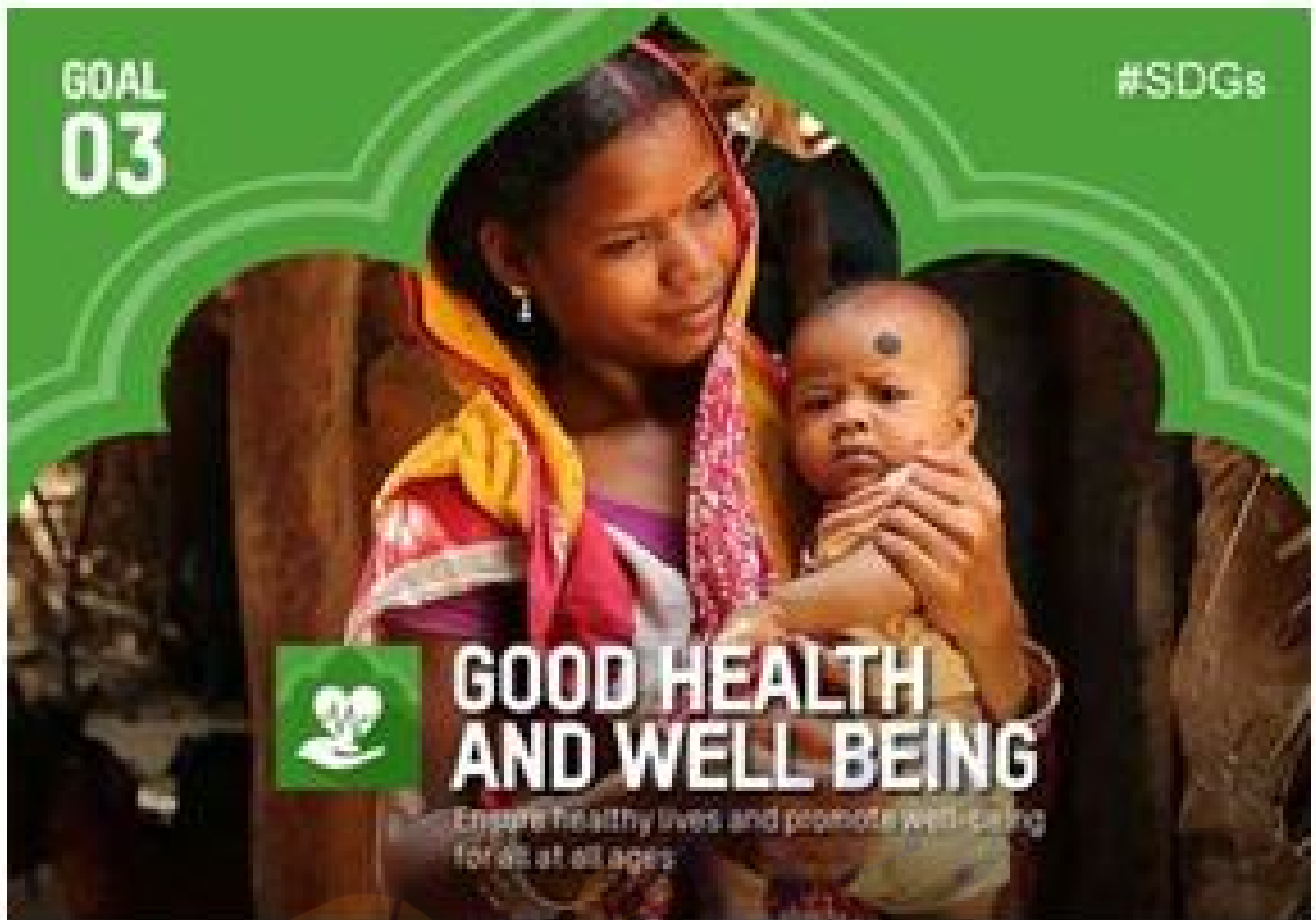
Exam Question

Q: What are some challenges faced by poor families in accessing healthcare?

A: Poor families often face undernutrition, lack of basic amenities, high medical costs, and social barriers, making it difficult to access timely and adequate healthcare.

Government Initiatives and Examples

The government uses tax revenue to fund public services including healthcare. Initiatives like Jan Aushadhi Medical Stores provide affordable generic medicines. Mobile clinics reach remote areas to provide healthcare and disease control, such as malaria eradication programs. The Kerala model demonstrates decentralized planning and investment in health, education, and water supply, improving health outcomes despite some ongoing challenges.



Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

www.in.undp.org

Exam Question

Q: How do mobile clinics help improve healthcare in rural areas?

A: Mobile clinics bring medical services directly to remote communities, improving access to diagnosis, treatment, and disease control where healthcare facilities are scarce.

Sustainable Development Goals Related to Health

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being, aiming to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages. Goal 6 focuses on Clean Water and Sanitation, essential for preventing waterborne diseases and

improving health. These goals emphasize the importance of healthcare access, disease prevention, nutrition, and sanitation for sustainable development.



Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)
www.in.undp.org

Exam Question

Q: Why is access to clean water and sanitation important for health?

A: Clean water and sanitation prevent the spread of waterborne diseases, improve hygiene, and are essential for overall health and well-being.

Legal Responsibility of Government in Healthcare

According to the Indian Constitution, it is the government's primary duty to ensure the welfare of its people, including providing healthcare facilities. The Right to Life includes timely medical treatment, and courts have ruled that governments must provide necessary health services, including emergency care. Hospitals and medical staff have a duty to provide treatment, and the government is responsible for funding such services.

Exam Question

Q: What is the government's legal obligation regarding healthcare?

A: The government must ensure the right to life by providing timely and necessary healthcare services to all citizens, including emergency treatment.

Solved Examples

Example 1: Explain why many rural areas in India have limited access to doctors despite the large number of medical graduates.

Answer: Most doctors prefer to live and work in urban areas due to better facilities and opportunities, leading to a shortage of doctors in rural areas.

Example 2: Describe one way the government helps make medicines affordable.

Answer: The government runs Jan Aushadhi Medical Stores that sell generic medicines at lower prices than branded ones, making treatment more affordable.

Practice Set

Easy

- What does health mean beyond the absence of disease?
- Name two major communicable diseases prevalent in India.

Moderate

- Explain the difference between public and private healthcare services.
- Why is access to clean drinking water important for health?

Challenging

- Discuss the paradox of healthcare availability in India despite having many medical colleges and hospitals.
- How did the Kerala model improve health outcomes through decentralized planning?

Answer Key

- **Health meaning:** Physical, mental, and social well-being, not just absence of disease.
- **Communicable diseases:** Tuberculosis, malaria.
- **Public vs Private healthcare:** Public is government-run and affordable; private is owned by individuals/companies and costly.
- **Clean water importance:** Prevents waterborne diseases and promotes hygiene.
- **Healthcare paradox:** Despite many doctors and hospitals, uneven distribution and resource constraints limit access.
- **Kerala model:** Decentralized budget to local bodies improved water, education, health services.

Quick Reference

- Health includes physical, mental, and social well-being.
- Public healthcare is free or low cost, aimed at all citizens.
- Private healthcare is expensive and concentrated in cities.
- Access to clean water and sanitation is vital for health.
- Government has a constitutional duty to provide healthcare.
- Jan Aushadhi stores provide affordable generic medicines.
- Mobile clinics improve rural healthcare access.
- Kerala's decentralized planning improved health outcomes.
- UN SDGs Goal 3 and 6 focus on health and clean water.

Glossary

- **Public:** Services organized by the government for all citizens.
- **Private:** Services run by individuals or companies for profit.
- **Medical tourists:** Foreigners visiting India for medical treatment.
- **Communicable diseases:** Diseases spread from person to person or through environment.
- **OPD (Out Patient Department):** Hospital section for patients not admitted to wards.
- **Ethics:** Moral principles guiding behavior.
- **Generic names:** Chemical names of drugs recognized globally.

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