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Healthcare budget 2018 focuses on Universal Health Coverage making healthcare more accessible

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Government further announced doubling of funding to Rs3073 crore for digital technology, artificial intelligence, block chain technology, big data, robotics that would encourage and further spur a growth of the startup ecosystem in the country.



Finance Minister announced two major initiatives under the Ayushman Bharat Program in the Union Budget 2018 catering to primary, secondary and tertiary care. One, with the National Health Policy announced last year, the Government proposed establishment of 1.5 lakh health and wellness centres with an aim to provide comprehensive care to the people for treatment and diagnostics for NCDs as well as Maternal and Child Health. Government committed Rs1200 crore for this flagship programme. Government also invited contribution from the private sector as a part of their CSR mandate for adoption of these Wellness and Health Centres. And two, the National Health Protection Scheme - with an aim of reaching to about 10 crore poor and vulnerable families, the government plans to reach out to approximately 50 crore beneficiaries, providing up to Rs 5 lakh health insurance cover per family per year. This will include Secondary and Tertiary Care.

Mr. Shireesh Sahai, CEO, Wolters Kluwer India said, “The announcement of the Ayushman Bharat Programme is a bold and ambitious move in the right direction. Once rolled out, it will hasten India’s progress towards achieving universal health coverage for all. Fresh investment in healthcare delivery infrastructure and medical education are also welcome developments, given that healthcare education and delivery need to be efficient for insurance outlays to be used optimally. The increase in medical colleges will hopefully change our presently skewed doctor-patient ratio.

Mr. Ganesh Sabat, CEO, SMT (Sahajanand Medical Technologies Pvt. Ltd) for your reference said, "This year’s Union Budget has been a people’s budget with a focus to uphold Modi’s ‘Make in India’ campaign. Schemes such as the launch of National Health Protection Scheme and bringing 24 new medical colleges pan India are some useful highlights being implemented by the Government. Through the introduction of these massive health programs, the Government is giving a clear signal that it is concerned about the healthcare and social security of the masses and they believe that medical healthcare is one of the backbone of the economy. This step is a productive move towards the path of universal healthcare for the poor and weaker section of our society.”

India must now consider the use of adaptive learning and mobile-based learning technologies in medical education, which will help our medical practitioners make the most of the latest developments in medicine and use global best practices to improve healthcare delivery in India. Countries that score high on healthcare metrics have made significant investment in healthcare technology that enable healthcare practitioners to make evidence based clinical decisions, which in turn lowers mortality and healthcare costs. Insurance companies that would be the implementation channels for the National Health Protection Scheme will benefit from the technologies that enable clinical effectiveness because they minimize risk and improve efficiencies. We look forward to partnering with the government in implementing these transformative programmes in India.”

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Commenting on the healthcare budget and the allocation of Rs 1200 crore towards Health and Wellness Centres that will provide comprehensive health care, including for non-communicable diseases, Abhishek Shah, Co-Founder of Wellthy Therapeutics said, “This step will significantly help in combatting one of the biggest challenges in healthcare in India today, which is the rising burden of Non-communicable diseases (NCDs). NCDs such as diabetes, cancer, and heart disease contribute to 61% of all mortalities every year in our country, and the WHO estimates that these will cost India almost $5 trillion dollars by 2030. This budgetary allocation for the prevention and treatment non-communicable diseases will be a critical step to stem the tide now. Furthermore, the launch of the National Health Protection Scheme is another vital move for achieving universal healthcare in India. In the last decade, we have watched our neighbor, China, successfully expand its UHC from a negligible number to 900 million citizens (95% coverage). A 5 lakh benefit / family for both primary and secondary healthcare, as long as its covering the wide range of healthcare issues and costs that it promises to be, is a huge boost by the government to provide the necessary impetus for India to achieve that rate of coverage. Proactive steps like this by a forward-thinking government can help enablers in healthcare to win the war against the disease burden in our country.”

Overall, Union Budget 2018-19 has proven to be a comprehensive, wide ranging and balanced budget, with many positives for the health sector. While the health budget has increased by 12 percent this year over last year, that still amounts to only 1.15% of GDP. India has the second largest population in the world and carries one-fifth of the disease burden. For us to further strengthen our health systems and provide affordable and accessible care to all, the healthcare budget needs a larger portion of the pie. This budget is indicative that we are headed in the right direction but need to accelerate our efforts.