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Govt unveils five pioneering health research initiatives for medical innovation

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ICMR is initiating efforts to develop drugs for rare diseases, focusing on affordable and effective therapies



Union Health Minister Jagat Prakash Nadda launched five Department of Health Research- Indian Council of Medical Research (DHR-ICMR) health research initiatives planned under the 100 days agenda. These initiatives aim to propel India to the forefront of global health research and innovation, aligning with the nation's vision of a Viksit Bharat.

Addressing the occasion, JP Nadda remarked, "These groundbreaking initiatives exemplify our commitment to a healthier and more self-reliant India. By fostering indigenous innovation and investing in advanced research, we are equipping our nation to tackle pressing health challenges effectively."

Dr Rajiv Bahl, Secretary DHR & DG ICMR said, “Initiatives like the 'First in the World' Challenge will empower our scientists and innovators to develop cutting-edge technologies that can benefit not just India but the entire world."

One of the key initiatives launched is the "First in the World" Challenge, inspired by the success of Chandrayaan-3. This high-risk, high-reward research and development scheme is designed to foster the creation of health technologies that are unprecedented globally. The programme will fund projects at various stages from proof of concept design to prototype and final product development.

Additionally, under the Pradhan Mantri – Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission (PM-ABHIM), ICMR is upgrading existing Viral Research & Diagnostic Laboratories (VRDLs) to Infectious Disease Research and Diagnostic Laboratories (IRDLs). This enhancement includes bacteriology, mycology, and parasitology, expanding diagnostic capabilities beyond virology. These laboratories will strengthen India's capacity for comprehensive surveillance and rapid response to infectious diseases.

ICMR also launched the ICMR Data Repository, a centralised, secure, and accessible platform of high-quality datasets, ensuring data integrity and privacy. The UNNATI Initiative (Upgrading Norms for Nutrition, Growth, and Development Assessment of Indian Children) aims to establish India-specific growth and development standards for children, addressing limitations of existing WHO benchmarks.

Moreover, ICMR is initiating efforts to develop drugs for rare diseases, focusing on affordable and effective therapies for conditions such as Gaucher Disease, Sickle Cell Disease, and others. Ongoing projects range from clinical trials to animal studies and design phases, aiming to reduce dependence on imported treatments and improve accessibility for patients in India.