

Experts at IHW Cancer Summit welcome budget waiver on customs duty for cancer drugs

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The 7th Cancer Summit & Awards 2026, organised by the Integrated Health & Wellbeing (IHW) Council in New Delhi on 3 February, brought together a powerful cross-section of India's cancer ecosystem on the eve of World Cancer Day.

The conclave convened clinicians, policymakers, industry leaders, researchers, patient advocates and civil society to deliberate on how India can move towards more equitable, affordable and technology-enabled cancer care.

This dialogue comes at a critical time, as per ICMR's National Cancer Registry estimates, India recorded over 15.3 lakh new cancer cases in 2024 and around 8–8.7 lakh deaths, against a global burden of 20 million new cases and 9.7 million deaths in 2022, underscoring the urgent need for earlier detection, wider access to care and stronger cancer systems, especially in low- and middle-income countries.

Through the day, focused sessions explored multiple dimensions of oncology in India. A high-powered panel on "Clinical & Technology Innovation" discussed advances in diagnostics, precision medicine, imaging and integrated genomics, and how these can be translated into wider access in both public and private settings. A dedicated industry presentation showcased how integrated oncogenomics can help navigate tumour heterogeneity and support more personalised treatment decisions.

In his welcome address, Kamal Narayan Omer, Founder & CEO, IHW Council, set the context for the summit and underlined the need for collective, system-wide action against cancer. “Meeting on the eve of World Cancer Day reminds us that India’s response to cancer must be urgent, coordinated and patient-centred. This summit was started to keep cancer at the heart of public and policy dialogue, not confined to hospitals alone. Recent steps like customs duty exemptions on life-saving cancer drugs and the Biopharma Shakti initiative show strong intent to improve access, affordability and indigenous innovation. Yet many of our 15 lakh annual cancer cases are detected late. Our aim is to bring all stakeholders together so that preventable and treatable cancers are neither missed nor denied care.”

Amit Kumar Ghosh, Additional Chief Secretary, Medical Health & Family Welfare and Medical Education, Government of Uttar Pradesh, delivered the keynote address and underscored the need to translate higher health investments into stronger cancer systems. He voiced, “India’s health sector is at a defining moment, with the Union Health Budget crossing Rs 1 lakh crore for the first time and firmly positioning healthcare as a driver of economic growth, social equity and the India@2047 vision. In Uttar Pradesh, we have expanded government medical colleges from 9 to 43 and are shifting from episodic to system-driven, preventive and technology-enabled care. Through initiatives such as Ayushman Bharat, population-based screening, new cancer institutes in Lucknow and planned cancer day-care centres across the state, our focus is on early detection, timely referral and affordable treatment. Going forward, stronger public-private collaboration and patient-centric policies will be key to reaching the last mile.”

The second half of the summit shifted focus to systems, policy and people, with sessions on research, capacity building and collaboration to build a sustainable oncology ecosystem through training, multidisciplinary teams, partnerships and regional cancer centres. It also explored how Ayushman Bharat and other national schemes can embed cancer prevention, screening, treatment and financial protection into mainstream public health.

Discussions on equity and patient-centric care tackled late diagnosis, geographic gaps, costs and psychosocial support, while a digital oncology panel highlighted tele-oncology, AI and data-driven models.