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Designing Better Healthcare: By Women, For Women

01 March 2026 | Features | By Vrushti Kothari

Women's health is expected to see more focus in 2026 due to advancements in medical diagnostics, increased health education, and the rising demand for personalised care. A recent example can be seen with Maharashtra becoming the first State in India to launch dedicated Menopause Clinics across government hospitals and urban healthcare centres, under the guidance of Minister of State for Public Health Meghna Bordikar. This International Women's Day, which is celebrated every year on March 8, let's take a look at how the women's healthcare sector is evolving in India, with innovative solutions being developed majorly by women themselves.



As per reports, the women healthcare market in India is projected to grow from \$0.81 billion in 2025 to \$1.75 billion by 2035, exhibiting a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8.08 per cent, thereby focusing on women's health issues such as breast cancer, cervical cancer, menstruation, reproductive health, menopause and much more.

The major factors contributing to this growth include technological advancements, new government initiatives and policies, cultural shifts, rising awareness, and increasing female workforce participation in the country.

Government policies and initiatives aimed at improving women's health are in fact one of the crucial drivers of the women healthcare market in India. For instance, in January 2026, under the guidance of Meghna Bordikar, Minister of State for Health, Maharashtra took a landmark step in women's healthcare by becoming the first state in India to introduce dedicated menopause clinics. The state has rolled out these clinics across government hospitals and urban health centres, creating a dedicated space for women experiencing menopause to seek support and care.

In December 2025, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has funded a new national clinical trial aimed at improving access to high-cost targeted cancer therapies for women, with the official launch of the IPIROC study by the Kolkata Gynaecological Oncology Trials and Translational Research (KOLGOTRG).

The trial developed by Dr Asima Mukhopadhyay, titled Intermittent PARP Inhibitor Regimen in Ovarian Cancer (IPIROC), will evaluate whether an intermittent, twice-weekly dosing strategy of the PARP inhibitor rucaparib can reduce side effects and costs while maintaining clinical efficacy in ovarian cancer patients.

Likewise, the government is putting a major focus on the growing burden of cervical cancer in the country. With 25 per cent of global cervical cancer deaths occurring in India, often due to late diagnosis, the government is stressing the critical need for preventive screening strategies, and supporting the industry in this process.

For example, the GCI-BIRAC-DBT programme titled 'Validating Indigenous Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) Tests for Cervical Cancer Screening in India' successfully validated rapid, point-of-care, RT-PCR-based human papillomavirus (HPV) diagnostic test kits, developed by the private sector (Truenat HPV-HR Plus by Goa-based Molbio Diagnostics, and Patho Detect by Pune-based Mylab Discovery Solutions).

According to **Dr Jitendra Singh, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Science and Technology, Government of India**, "The ultimate goal is to position India as a global leader in preventive healthcare, with one focus on recognising the prevalence of cervical cancer among adolescents and young women. The current screening methods for cervical cancer, including VIA/VILI, Pap smears, and HPV DNA testing, are costly, resource-intensive, and moderately sensitive. The new indigenous kits developed in India are expected to significantly reduce the cost and improve accessibility for widespread use."

As another development, Coimbatore Medical College Hospital is introducing a new medical procedure, Hyperthermic Intraperitoneal Chemotherapy (HIPEC), for the first time in state government hospitals. This treatment, designed for women afflicted with ovarian cancer, involves the direct application of heated chemotherapy drugs into the abdominal cavity.

The HIPEC machine which costs around Rs 1 crore is being procured from a private player of the global medtech industry. Recognising the necessity of this treatment for women, CMCH plans to offer the treatment free of charge under the Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme (CMCHIS).

With public-private partnerships getting stronger in the women healthcare space, another example was recently seen at the World Economic Forum 2026, where Smriti Irani, Former Minister of Women and Child Development, Government of India, showed her support towards the launch of a science-led women's wellness initiative by Andhra Pradesh-based Laila Nutraceuticals.

Led by Yuthika Gokaraju, Vice President – Business Development at Laila Nutraceuticals, the initiative brings together patented, clinically validated bioactives with advanced dual-release delivery systems designed for daily usability and consistent absorption, thereby improving women's health.

With women constituting approximately 48.4 per cent of the country's 1.4 billion population, the women's healthcare market is emerging as a significantly addressable one. However, complexities and challenges continue to hinder its growth. For instance, a large percentage of women in rural areas still lack access to basic diagnostic and specialist services. Moreover, many primary health centres are under-resourced, with shortages of trained professionals and essential equipment for women patients in particular.

"Today, breast cancer has emerged as the most common cancer among Indian women, while over 1.2 lakh new cervical cancer cases are reported annually, highlighting the urgent need for early screening and timely diagnosis. Yet, two challenges continue to hold the market back. First is affordability: out-of-pocket spending is still a major reality in India. Second is capability and talent. There is also a significant shortage of skilled professionals, including radiologists, lab technicians, and women's health specialists, which impacts service delivery and scalability. To truly accelerate progress, the industry must invest in talent development, strengthen infrastructure, and prioritise innovation in affordable, accessible, and women-centric diagnostic solutions", said **Anika Parashar, Health Veteran & Social Entrepreneur**.

Women reshaping innovations for women

In order to address some of the current challenges, we are now seeing that the women's healthcare market is being driven aggressively by women themselves. And that is also because women within the industry are carrying a personal understanding of the social, logistical and emotional barriers that influence healthcare decisions.

Quoting an example, Pragmatech Healthcare Solutions, a biotech startup co-founded by Sayantani Pramanik from Vadodara, has developed CERVICHECK, India's first CDSCO approved at-home, self-sampling kit for HPV screening to bring cervical cancer screening to every woman across the country. The kit has been developed in collaboration with Dr Gauravi Mishra and her team at the Tata Memorial Centre in Mumbai. For Pragmatech, the vision for the next five years is to emerge as a leading preventive women's health company in India and other low-resource countries.

Then there is Mumbai-based startup Pinky Promise, founded by Divya Balaji Kamerkar, Rahul Kamerkar, and Akanksha Vyas. A first-of-its-kind artificial intelligence (AI)-led digital clinic for women, the startup has raised \$1 million in a pre-seed funding a few weeks ago. Through their startup, the women founders have developed a platform to diagnose and manage women's health issues, addressing a critical gap in Indian healthcare for accessible, non-judgmental, and high-quality sexual and reproductive health care.

Serial entrepreneur Neha K Motwani has set up another example through her startup Luma Fertility. The startup has recently secured \$4 million in seed funding, to provide accessible, tech-enabled, and emotionally supportive fertility solutions.

Pune-based woman entrepreneur Jilma Peruvangat, through her startup Kozhnosys, is currently developing non-invasive diagnostic tools that analyse breath to detect volatile organic compounds (VOCs) associated with breast cancer, to be launched in the market in 2027. The startup's signature product, CanScan, is designed to screen for breast cancer using only a breath sample, offering a painless, quick alternative to conventional methods like mammography or biopsies.

Another startup based in Pune, Intignus Biotech founded by Dr Vaishnavi Kulkarni, has built PEscreens- a rapid, minimally invasive screening test that predicts the risk of preeclampsia weeks before symptoms manifest. Based on the levels of a placenta-based biomarker, the test uses just a drop of blood and provides results in about 15 minutes. It is designed to work at the point of care in hospitals, clinics, pathology labs, primary health centres, and even during routine antenatal visits. Preeclampsia, a pregnancy complication marked by high blood pressure and other serious symptoms, is responsible for a large number of maternal and foetal health issues worldwide. To be available at a cost of one-fourth of the current tests available, Dr Vaishnavi plans to launch this novel product for women on World Preeclampsia Day which falls on May 22.

At the International Institute of Information Technology, Hyderabad, Prof. Nita Parekh, Professor of Bioinformatics is integrating data for early breast cancer detection as the disease has several subtypes. By combining DNA methylation data,

RNA expression profiles and machine learning, Prof. Nita's team has identified molecular signatures that can distinguish cancer subtypes, predict patient risk and survival and also point to early diagnostic markers. These findings pave the way for liquid biopsies, simple blood tests that detect cancer signals long before symptoms appear.

According to **Dr Radhika Sheth, Medical Director, Luma Fertility**, "What is becoming increasingly clear to me in clinical practice is that women in India are entering the healthcare system with different expectations than they did even a few years ago. There is greater awareness around early testing, reproductive planning and long-term health risks, yet the system is still catching up with how and when women seek care. The rapid rise of FemTech and women's health startups reflects how unmet clinical needs are being translated into accessible tools. Teleconsultation, symptom tracking and diagnostics designed for conditions such as PCOS and endometriosis are improving engagement, but access alone is not enough. For women's healthcare to truly progress, innovation must be paired with evidence-based public health frameworks, stronger clinical governance and scalable training models."

The women's healthcare market in India stands at a pivotal moment during 2026, being shaped by new developments and innovations, yet constrained by certain challenges. What we now truly need is a multi-stakeholder collaboration involving policymakers, healthcare professionals, scientists, technology innovators, and women themselves to unlock the true potential of the women's healthcare sector.

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