

Should India find an opportunity in GAVI's proposed funding withdrawal ?

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Mr Seth Berkley, chief executive of the GAVI Alliance is reported to have said that the leading vaccine initiative support organization is planning to reduce its role in immunization programs in India drastically. "India is now getting close to the threshold level, at which point we stop providing support. So, once a country crosses that level, they have five years time for GAVI support," he recently told a news publication, also adding that they are in talks with the government to decide the course of action for the next five years."

It is important to note that India at the moment has not parked any separate funds for the huge immunization programs launched earlier and in the recent past. In fact our health allocation is a mere 1 percent of GDP of the country. The issue has been widely debated and all eyes are on the Modi government's real action in this regard.

Therefore, the big question is how will India be able to drive its ambitious program to achieve immunity against key diseases without proper assessment of funding needs? While one can partially agree with certain viewpoints within the government about the availability of sufficient funds in its treasury, the reason of concern is again on specifics. Wouldn't it be wise to have a working arrangement between various state health ministries and that of union government to work on the modalities in a situation where the international support providers are withdrawing the field citing reasons that might not be completely true.

The kind of expertise and technical provided by GAVI in past has been much appreciated and there is little doubt that its absence in next 5 years means that the shortcomings of state and central government's contribution to public health will have to be taken care of soon.

While the GAVI's approved budget for India from 2000-2015 was \$278.70 million, the other international group, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria was \$850 million (it has also announced the halt to any further funds). The withdrawal of such funds cannot be ignored yet it can serve as an action point for our health ministry to prepare for future.

As world second largest populous country with 120 crore people and counting, India has to realize that there is no alternative to boosting its own health system.