

Investing in the health of people

CHANDRAJIT BANERJEE

Director General, CII



Ayushman Bharat is a fertile ground for inter-sectoral collaboration

INDIA'S GROWING POPULATION is, at times, held accountable for many of the challenges that the nation faces—housing, unemployment, pollution, depletion of natural resources, poverty, poor health, etc. If we look at Japan, a population decrease of 1 million over the last five years has become a cause of concern for the nation's economic growth. From that perspective, India is at an advantage because the age group of 15-64 years, which makes up 66% of the population (85,15,21,155 people), comprises of both potential and incumbent workforce that are drivers of growth. But a high disease burden and a sharp disparity in access to healthcare services have been a cause of resistance in the nation's pathway to progress for a very long time.

In 2015, the CII made a proposal to the Prime Minister titled 'Health Assurance to All: Leveraging the Power of a Billion'. It recommended a health insurance model for provision of secondary and tertiary services to the underprivileged and strengthening the preventive health system in the country. The objective was to deliver healthcare to every single person irrespective of her socioeconomic background. Thereafter, Universal Healthcare became a rationale for any intervention implemented in the healthcare field. It is a matter of pride that the two pillars of Ayushman Bharat—National Health Protection Scheme (NHPS) and Setting up of Primary Health Centres (PHCs)—have not only embraced Universal Healthcare as its objective, but also subsumed quite a few of our recommendations under its umbrella.

The NHPS will provide healthcare assurance of ₹5 lakh to 10 crore underprivileged families (50 crore people) for secondary and tertiary healthcare services. Being a scheme of such a massive scale, the stakeholders involved are also far too many and, hence, the impact of its implementation is going to be trans-sectoral. It is predicted that 1 lakh jobs will be created. Besides medical professionals, IT, infrastructure, MSME, medical technology, banking and other sectors will have to get involved, driving various aspects of this mission. Even though private care providers hail this scheme, they also sincerely hope this is financially viable to them with timely reimbursements and appropriate package rates. Many deliberations have happened on these issues and developments are under way.

The second pillar of Ayushman Bharat will focus on preventive healthcare by setting up 1.5 lakh PHCs. An adequate workforce is the dire need for these establishments to function efficiently. The infrastructure sector will have a big role to play as the scheme envisions strengthening primary healthcare system in tier-2 and tier-3 cities. This enormous addition to the healthcare landscape cannot be efficacious without the additional support of a skilled manpower and medical diagnostics. Since this is the first point of contact between the patient and healthcare services, it will play a crucial role in diagnosis and screening of diseases at initial stages, reducing the burden on secondary and tertiary services. Enhancing skill-sets of the existing workforce, defining career progression pathways for medical professionals, leveraging virtual training platforms, developing a robust physician development programme for up-skilling of MBBS doctors are some of the areas to intervene to build requisite human resource. This mission will not only be restricted to urban areas, but will also expand to the remotest of districts, thereby bringing about rural development. This is a good occasion for MSMEs to gain a foothold, thereby providing an impetus to their growth and contributing to overall development. Other industries must find opportunities in this gigantic scheme and, I am sure, many areas of inter-sectoral collaboration will come to the fore as the scheme unfurls.

This journey can be seamless if we consider our population our strength. With the current burden of challenges India has overcome China, by becoming the fastest growing nation. It is difficult not to expect even bigger accomplishments with a healthier workforce. Ayushman Bharat is the foundation stone for a stable nation-building process that would not only encourage inter-sectoral collaboration, enhancing industrial growth, but also result in a productive and healthy workforce for the growth of the nation.

Enhancing skill-sets of the existing workforce, defining career progression for medicos can help build the requisite human resource