

Not a healthy budget, say experts

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A disappointing budget for the health sector as promises have not been fulfilled and expectations from the assurances made by the 12th five year plan not lived up to is the common refrain among experts who have been involved in various committees at the planning commission.

Dr K Srinath Reddy, president, Public Health Foundation of India who is also the first Indian President of the World Heart Federation and part of the high level expert group on universal health coverage expressed disappointment at the budgetary provisions for the health sector. "I am disappointed that health has not been prioritised in the budget," Reddy said. It will be difficult to introduce the national urban health mission with the meagre funds allocated, he added.

Sangita Reddy, executive director, operations, Apollo hospitals, said, the country's expenditure on health is lower than most of the developing and developed countries. While there has been a 24 per cent increase in the budget for the health sector at Rs 37,330 crore, the overall percentage of GDP for health will not cross 2 per cent. The current allocation can only suffice to manage primary health care, she said adding that the rise should have been 200 per cent.

Dr Anant Phadke, co-convenor, Jan Arogya Abhiyan too expressed dismay at the budgetary allocation on health. "Compared to what the planning commission had recommended in the 12th five year plan with a 35% rise every year on health, the 24% rise is very little," he said. The Rashtriya Swastha Bima Yojana, however, in the budget has now been extended to autorickshaw drivers, rag pickers and mine workers which is a welcome development, Phadke said.

Dr Anita Kar, professor, University of Pune's Inter disciplinary school of health sciences, said, the expansion of the Rashtriya Swastha Bima Yojana to sanitation workers and others is a welcome development. The promise of a comprehensive and integrated social security package for the unorganised sector is crucial as this group bears the brunt of disability or poor health with suboptimal care. Also, a dedicated allocation of funds for the urban health mission is welcome in the wake of increasing cardiovascular diseases and cancers, Kar said.