



WHO calls for universal health coverage in India



New Delhi: India should work towards universal health coverage, the World Health Organisation (WHO) India representative Nata Menabde declared Friday.

Talking to media persons after WHO and the health ministry released a joint Country Cooperation Strategy (CCS), Menabde said universal health coverage should be among the government's priorities in order to reduce the burden on the common man.

"We need to see that people are financially protected. Presently 75 percent of the expenditure goes from peoples' own pocket," she said.

"A change is needed at the policy level. More than cash transfer, there is a need to build institutions to facilitate it."

Asked when she thought India could launch its universal health coverage, Menabde felt it could take around a decade to cover every individual.

"It may take around 10 years to extend health cover to all," she said adding, "India already has it in some states in other ways, like the free medicine scheme in Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu".

Moreover, a policy review had become necessary as the Indian population is aging.

"The demographic dividend won't be there in a few decades. India will have a more aged population, sick or healthy, and lesser numbers in the working age group. So the policy needs to be reviewed to give healthcare to the aging population," Menabde said.

Menabde also said that India needs to strengthen the monitoring mechanism for generic medicines in order to emerge as a global player in drugs supply.

"India has to strengthen its monitoring of medicines so that the huge advantage it has because of its generic medicines is not lost," she said.

Releasing the document Health Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad said such tie-ups were needed for India to meet challenges of the health sector.

"Not only our health, but our children's health too depends on these strategic choices and collaborations between the critical constituents of our health system," Azad said.

The joint document focuses on efforts to "unleash the role of India in the global health scene with the continued pursuit of health improvement in the country".

The CCS will be implemented on the basis of two-year action plans developed by the WHO in consultation with the Health Ministry taking into account the health priorities envisaged in the 12th Five Year Plan.

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