Make universal healthcare a reality, says Pranab

Aarti Dhar
President Pranab Mukherjee receiving the Green Certificate from FICCI president R.V. Kanaria at an international conference in New Delhi on Tuesday. Photo: Rajeev Bhatt

Private sector says 10-year timeframe needed to accomplish goal

Even as President Pranab Mukherjee on Tuesday called upon all stakeholders in the health sector to make universal healthcare a reality, the private sector believes that the expenditure on rolling out the programme would require 5.5 to 6 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and a 10-year time frame to accomplish it.
Speaking at the Heal Annual International Conference 2012, organised by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, on the theme of “Universal Healthcare: Dream or Reality?” the President said any healthcare system would need to be country-specific and India would need to look at achieving universal health coverage based on its own perspective and requirements.

**Human resource vital**

India's medical healthcare system must be developed to cater to all sections, in rural as well as in urban areas, he said while emphasising that merely constructing hospitals was not enough. Human resource was required to make them functional and effective. There was a need to augment medical colleges, nursing institutions, and training schools for paramedical professions, he added.

On the issue of affordability, Mr. Mukherjee said technology-based initiatives including telemedicine could be employed to broaden the reach of healthcare. Ways to encourage cooperation between the public and private sectors in achieving health goals also must be identified and emphasised the need to promote preventive healthcare.

A FICCI and Ernst & Young’s Knowledge Paper on “Universal health cover for India: Demystifying financing needs,” released at the conference suggests that including out of pocket expenditure, the estimated total spending on health would be between 5.5 per cent and 6 per cent of GDP. China, which has embarked on a journey toward universal health care (UHC) and covered 84 per cent of its population, spends 5.1 per cent of the GDP on health, of which 2.7 per cent was spent by the government.

“The implementation of the UHC is likely to increase the consumption of health care services. A sharper increase is anticipated in the short-term, when a large latent need is addressed. Hence, total expenditure on health is likely to increase. Given the scale of implementation and infrastructure constraints, it may be prudent to assume a 10-year timeframe to accomplish the UHC in totality. We, thus, estimate government health expenditure of 3.7 per cent to 4.5 per cent of GDP in 2022 to implement the UHC programme, which covers out-patient [consultation fee, drugs, diagnostic tests] and in-patient [ailments covered under the Rashtriya Swasthya BimaYojana and the Aarogyasri] services for the entire population,” the paper said.

According to it, the key factors that will decide the success of the UHC programme would be focus on health outcomes by reducing disease burden through a robust and functioning primary care system, quality in-patient care and facilitating effective utilisation of the available infrastructure.

The paper also favoured an integrated approach to ensure focus on allied determinants that have a critical impact on health, mainly nutrition, sanitation and wellness.
Make universal healthcare a reality, says Pranab

Keywords: President Pranab Mukherjee, universal healthcare system, FICCI, gross domestic product, UHC programme

More In: National | News