Activists to approach PMO on universal healthcare

Staff Reporter

Workshop held on recommendations of high-level panel

Abolition of user fee in hospitals, 24X7 availability of healthcare services, a universal system to provide health care to all those who need it, free supply of medicines, and a strong grievance redressal mechanism.

These are some of the demands that evolved out of a workshop on universal access to health care organised by Janaarogya Andolana Karnataka (JAAK) here on Wednesday.

Following the recommendations of the High Level Expert Group (HLEG) on Universal Health Coverage (UHC) to the Planning Commission's steering committee on health, the Union government had planned to incorporate them in the 12th Five Year Plan.

Differing opinions

But in the wake of differing opinions, they were sent to the Prime Minister's Office for detailed study. Wednesday's workshop was aimed at providing comments and criticism on these recommendations.

Representations

Participants at the workshop resolved to submit a letter highlighting their demands to the PMO. Member organisations and non-governmental organisations working in the health sector too will forward similar letters to the PMO, and the Union and State Health Ministries.

Referring to the recommendations of the HLEG, Prasanna Saligram from the Centre for Public Health and Equity, said: “We commend the HLEG for advising against using commercial insurance for organising universal healthcare.
However, many people may not be in favour of the suggestion to provide Essential Health Package (EHP) as an entitlement.”

E. Premdas of JAAK said such a package would not cover a vast range of common and significant illnesses and conditions for which people access health care at primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

**Apprehensions**

“We fear that, many of the leading causes of morbidity, hospitalisation and death, will not be covered by such a limited package. The result would be continuing high out of pocket expenditure and impoverishment. It is essential for all illnesses and conditions, with minimal exclusions, to be comprehensively covered by the UHC system, for it to be a genuine Universal Health Care system,” he said.

**Suggestions**

Researcher Asha Kilaru said substantial strengthening and expansion of public health services, combined with effective community accountability mechanisms, should be at the core of any UHC model in India.

The participants resolved to urge the Prime Minister to ensure that the Planning Commission and Union Health Ministry organised a dialogue with civil society representatives around these issues, before finalising the health component of 12th Five Year Plan.

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