Govt drafting laws to target health cover for all

The government is preparing to expand its healthcare net to cover every Indian. It’s making two laws — the Public Health Act and Clinical Establishment Act — to action this plan, which aims to provide essential health services to all citizens by 2017. The budget for this will come to almost Rs 5 lakh crore, double the outlay in the 11th five-year plan (2007-12).

The proposed laws would also make it mandatory for private hospitals to provide services in emergency situations, adopt minimum standards and follow the government’s price regulations. To achieve this, the laws would bring the existing health machinery — the state government’s department of health services — under its ambit.

Government sources said the labour ministry will expand its existing health insurance scheme to ensure all residents have access to emergency and OPD services and avail health services up to Rs 2 lakh per year by paying a small premium. “The ministry’s budget is being doubled to roll out the scheme,” an official said, requesting anonymity since an official announcement is yet to be made.

The initiative will be kick-started on March 16, when finance minister Pranab Mukherjee is expected to announce a government-sponsored health insurance scheme for all.

The proposed laws would ensure access to rural health centres, maternity and child care facilities and public health courses in all medical colleges. A Planning Commission steering committee has also asked the government to make it a must for medical students to work in rural areas.

But, the biggest bottleneck is that health is a state subject. Hence, the committee wants the Centre to link the disbursement of funds with implementation of the model law. “An MoU with each state government linking implementation of these laws would soon be in the offing,” said a plan panel functionary.

http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/Print/823602.aspx
© Copyright © 2011 HT Media Limited. All Rights Reserved.