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[Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission – the driver of Universal Health Coverage](#)

As India observes Ayushman Bharat Diwas today, it is critical to reflect on what will accelerate India's journey towards achieving Universal Health Coverage. While the public healthcare system in India has made significant strides, access to quality healthcare remains a privilege, restricted to select urban geographies.

Barriers to universal healthcare

Healthcare in India has long been delivered in unconnected silos. Particularly in the public health system, one program does not have access to another, creating duplication, fragmenting patient information, and leading to poor quality data availability to policy makers and the research community.

Age-old problems like poor doctor-patient ratio, poor indicators of health outcomes, and unnecessary costs for patients, leave them disillusioned and distrusting of the public healthcare system.

The Gamechanger – Integrated Digital Health Infrastructure

A robust digital public infrastructure can create a fertile environment for “consumer-centric” innovation, bridge need gaps, and cater to unfulfilled demand. The Unified Payments Interface and AADHAAR are prime examples.

The launch of Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) by the Government of India in 2021 has given a boost to healthcare digitisation. The entire ecosystem stands to benefit with integrated digital health infrastructure, leading to improved health outcomes for all citizens.

Creating a Single-Platform Health Ecosystem

ABDM is a revolutionary step to weed away inefficiencies from the system due to loss of medical records or information disparity. Accurate information on health facilities and service providers will enable informed decisions to be made, thereby increasing accountability of healthcare providers.

Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission connects healthcare stakeholders via digital pathways on a single platform. It has several components, including digital registries of health providers and hospitals, unique IDs, a consent framework, and universal access to health facilities, that will unlock creativity and enable solving some of the hardest problems at the last mile.

The Biggest Impact – Real-time Data

With Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, India can now think of ways to reap the biggest benefit that a truly digital healthcare system can yield – Data! Currently, most healthcare stakeholders use disparate health data systems that create inefficiencies in multi-stakeholder processes.

Information transparency through “Health registries” will receive a boost and act as the single source of truth for all stakeholders, increasing trust and credibility, while driving the shift from siloed systems to streamlined processes. ABDM will facilitate secure flows of health information such as medical bills, prescriptions, and lab reports from one stakeholder to another irrespective of whether they are connected to each other, and with the consent of the data owner. Additionally, IoT monitoring of health devices and facilities can provide access to real-time data to health officials.

The records of a patient in a remote village with inadequate healthcare infrastructure will be readily accessible by medical experts in areas with advanced health infrastructure via the ABDM, and the patient can benefit from early detection and correct diagnosis.

Moreover, the availability of longitudinal health data (data of a patient over a lifetime), can solve complex health issues plaguing the country. A simple example is when the government wants to ascertain the side effects of a drug that is being administered over a longer term, say 10 years in different age groups and genders, data will be the key determinant.

Also, the creation of Command Control Centres, like the one set up in Bihar, can enable states to monitor health parameters and take data-backed decisions.

Reasons for Hope

Many states have begun implementing ABDM. The Press Information Bureau estimates that 20,97,55,222 digital health IDs have been created in the country, as of March 28, 2022.

Some social sector organizations have begun the journey of transformative change by collaborating with state governments to establish a robust digital service delivery platform and enhance customer experiences in accessing government services.

They are also extending support to develop and scale digital technologies so that precious health resources go where they are needed most.

ABDM – leading the paradigm shift to Universal Health Coverage

To make UHC a reality, multistakeholder collaboration is key to put in place patient-centric innovations like the virtual hospital, software-based disease diagnosis, telemedicine and use of extensive Artificial Intelligence in healthcare settings, to name a few.

For India, as it stands at the cusp of mammoth healthcare transformation, the time for Universal Health Coverage has come. The ground-breaking Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, with its promise of quality, accessibility, transparency, and affordability, is a gigantic leap in that direction.

Robust implementation of Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, sustained financial support, strong political will, shared commitment of all stakeholders can have a transformative impact on India’s public health system, and leapfrog India’s journey towards achieving her target of Universal Health Coverage, as part of the Sustainable Development Goals.

