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Vision 2047: Opportunities and challenges for the Indian healthcare sector

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Abstract

India is now emerging as a world leader and having strong international relations with rest of the world. In India, there are numerous public as well as private hospitals and healthcare delivery centres that aims to provide health services to the population but it is still lagging behind as compared to the other countries. This research article explores the key opportunities and challenges in Indian health sector in the way to Viksit Bharat. Accessibility, availability and affordability are the prime challenges faced by the population. The paper also discusses the new prospects that could spur the creation of a more resilient and inclusive healthcare system in spite of these challenges. Promising opportunities for development are provided by governmental changes, the expanding digital health ecosystem, technological advancements and greater involvement from the business sector. The article emphasizes the significance of strategic investments, creative healthcare delivery methods, and extensive reforms to close current gaps and create a sustainable healthcare system in the framework of India's ambition for a "Viksit Bharat". India can make progress towards attaining universal health coverage and better health outcomes for all of its population by tackling these issues and taking advantage of these opportunities.

Keywords: Accessibility, availability, affordability, rural-urban differences, social disparities, sustainable healthcare system, Viksit Bharat

Introduction

Viksit Bharat @2047 represents an aspiration to transform India into a developed nation by the year 2047, marking the centenary of its independence. The vision covers several facets of development, such as social advancement, economic expansion, good governance and environment sustainability, to name a few. As India works to achieve the goal of Viksit Bharat

(Developed India), the country's healthcare system is going through a paradigm transition. With a population of over 1.4 billion, India has a diversified population, with notable differences in healthcare availability between states, socioeconomic classes, and urban and rural locations. Despite significant advancements in recent decades, India's healthcare system still confronts significant obstacles that prevent it from offering high-quality, egalitarian care to all citizens of the nation. Resolving these issues is crucial for the country's overall economic growth and development as well as for the health and welfare of its citizens.

The shortage of healthcare infrastructure is one of the main issues, especially in rural areas where there are insufficient medical facilities, professionals and equipment. A substantially large percentage of population lives in rural areas, which is affected by poor healthcare facilities, lengthy travel times to hospitals and restricted access to necessary medication and therapies. The burden of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) in rural India is rising, according to research, and the distribution of NCDs is currently no longer biased towards urban and higher socioeconomic strata (Nath *et al.*, 2021) ^[5]. Enhancing the availability and accessibility of high-quality basic health and family welfare services for the rural population residing in about 6 lakh villages, where 72.2% of the population lives, and guaranteeing their utilisation are crucial concerns (Satpathy, 2005) ^[6]. On the contrary, urban centres are dealing with issues regarding overburden, increased demand and growing healthcare expenses.

India also faces a scarcity of qualified medical personnel, such as physicians, nurses and specialists. There are still not enough medical professionals relative to the population, even though the country has one of the biggest education programs in the world. Additionally, lack of training in specialised fields to professionals have increased challenges faced by patients who need complicated medical treatments. Despite these obstacles, India's healthcare system has enormous transformational potential. Digital health technologies present previously unheard-of chances to fill the healthcare disparity. Access to healthcare services is already being improved by telemedicine, e-health platforms, and mobile health apps, particularly in rural and isolated locations. Big data analytics, wearable medical technology, and AI-driven diagnostics all hold promise for improving service quality, simplifying procedures, and improving

health outcome prediction. In addition, India is becoming a centre for biotechnology and medical research, producing cutting-edge medical equipment, generic medications, and reasonably priced vaccinations to tackle global health concerns.

Challenges and opportunities faced by Indian Healthcare sector

The challenges and opportunities that Indian healthcare sector is facing has been discussed under three aspects:

1. Physical Infrastructure Aspect

This aspect highlights the availability of government hospitals and number of beds. Availability of beds per thousand population is calculated for more comprehensive understanding.

Table 1: Number of hospitals and Number of beds as on 31.12.2022

State/Union Territory	Number of Government Hospitals*			Number of Beds			Population (in 000)	Availability of beds (per 000 population)
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total		
Andhra Pradesh	1,276	691	1,967	11,840	28,012	39,852	52,972	0.75
Arunachal Pradesh	113	71	184	465	2,198	2,663	1,548	1.72
Assam	1,262	78	1,340	10,070	13,115	23,185	35,378	0.65
Bihar	1,761	101	1,862	12,125	14,393	26,518	1,24,919	0.21
Chhattisgarh	198	49	247	9,200	410	9,610	29,836	0.32
Goa	25	21	46	1,926	1,452	3,378	1,567	2.15
Gujarat	1,822	478	2,300	22,092	27,059	49,151	70,648	0.69
Haryana	527	128	655	6,042	8,188	14,230	29,846	0.47
Himachal Pradesh	727	76	803	7,123	9,467	16,590	7,431	2.23
Jharkhand	4,344	84	4,428	10,517	3,089	13,606	38,969	0.34
Karnataka	2,357	629	2,986	19,317	52,086	71,403	67,268	1.06
Kerala	1,073	214	1,287	16,285	22,240	38,525	35,633	1.08
Madhya Pradesh	330	135	465	13,410	21,206	34,616	85,548	0.40
Maharashtra	364	148	512	10,920	16,417	27,337	1,25,411	0.21
Manipur	5	6	11	437	2,017	2,454	3,194	0.76
Meghalaya	146	15	161	2,080	2,470	4,550	3,318	1.37
Mizoram	72	22	94	935	1,050	1,985	1,227	1.61
Nagaland	152	19	171	921	967	1,888	2,213	0.85
Odisha	1,671	179	1,850	6,995	18,641	25,636	45,987	0.55
Punjab	461	214	675	4,608	14,412	19,020	30,535	0.62
Rajasthan	2,267	969	3,236	13,602	44,878	58,480	80,153	0.72
Sikkim	24	12	36	260	1,550	1,810	683	2.65
Tamil Nadu	2,003	641	2,644	49,197	67,536	1,16,733	76,631	1.52
Telangana	701	400	1,101	5,020	29,288	34,308	37,907	0.90
Tripura	145	25	170	2,170	3,173	5,343	4,109	1.30
Uttar Pradesh	3,929	1,013	4,942	44,505	35,047	79,552	2,33,297	0.34
Uttarakhand	579	117	696	3,394	5,024	8,418	11,518	0.73
West Bengal	1,293	217	1,510	25,664	71,336	97,000	98,604	0.98
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	27	3	30	821	588	1,409	402	3.50
Chandigarh	.	54	54	.	4,035	4,035	1,219	3.31
Dadra & Nagar Haveli & Daman & Diu	13	2	15	543	695	1,238	1,170	1.05
Delhi	.	114	114	.	31,492	31,492	20,965	1.50
Jammu & Kashmir	1,596	214	1,810	5,979	3,955	9,934	13,505	0.73
Ladakh	42	2	44	338	464	802	299	2.69
Lakshadweep	10	.	10	250	.	250	68	3.67
Puducherry	86	51	137	341	2,965	3,306	1,608	2.05
All India	30,125	6,501	36,626	3,07,552	5,32,903	8,40,455	13,75,586	

Not Applicable.

Notes:

1. Data as on 31.12.2022.
2. Government hospitals include central government, state government and local govt. bodies.
3. Delhi and Chandigarh have no rural area.

Source: Handbook of Statistics on Indian States

Population: Population Projection for India and States 2011-2036 (2020)

Availability of beds per 000 population: Calculated by authors

Table 1 shows availability of government hospitals and number of beds across states.

There were 36,626 government hospitals in India whereas number of beds were 8,40,455 in 2022.

1.1 Challenges

Despite India has made great advancement in healthcare sector, it still needs to upgrade, especially in rural areas. Many areas do not have medical facilities, diagnostic tools, and healthcare workers.

- **Acute shortage of beds:** Availability of beds per 000 population is very low. As we can see in table 1, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh were at lowest, having 0.21 beds per thousand population while Sikkim is at highest position with 2.65 beds per thousand population.
- **Less number of Government hospitals:** Despite its vast and expanding population, India lacks the healthcare infrastructure—especially public healthcare facilities—to adequately serve everyone's requirements. A large percentage of the population is served by government hospitals, which are frequently overcrowded, understaffed, and devoid of contemporary equipment, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

1.2 Opportunities

- **Investment in medical infrastructure:** As India's population rose to 142.86 crores in 2023, available medical infrastructure is serving nation but it needs to be upgraded and a huge amount of investment is required to uplift Indian healthcare sector.
- **Telemedicine:** With only 3% of India's specialist doctors living in rural areas and 25% in semi-urban areas, the country's 700 million-population of rural areas still lack adequate health care facilities. Telemedicine offers a solution in these situations by enabling remote patient diagnosis, monitoring, and treatment through video conferencing or the use of the internet.

2. Human Resource Infrastructure aspect

This aspect focuses on the availability of doctors and specialists at PHCs (Primary Health Centres). Table 1 shows doctors and specialists at PHCs in 2022. To calculate availability of doctors (per'000 population), projected population of 2022 has been used.

Table 2: Doctors and Specialists at PHCs as on 31.12.2022

States/UTs	Doctors and Specialists	Population (000)	Availability of Doctors (per'000 population)
Andhra Pradesh	2048	52,972	0.0387
Arunachal Pradesh	129	1,548	0.0833
Assam	1381	35,378	0.0390
Bihar	1538	1,24,919	0.0123
Chhattisgarh	491	29,836	0.0165
Goa	66	1,567	0.0421
Gujarat	1692	70,648	0.0239
Haryana	591	29,846	0.0198
Himachal Pradesh	501	7,431	0.0674
Jharkhand	285	38,969	0.0073
Karnataka	2078	67,268	0.0309
Kerala	1503	35,633	0.0422
Madhya Pradesh	1631	85,548	0.0191
Maharashtra	3239	1,25,411	0.0258
Manipur	308	3,194	0.0964
Meghalaya	171	3,318	0.0515
Mizoram	57	1,227	0.0465
Nagaland	130	2,213	0.0587
Odisha	990	45,987	0.0215
Punjab	418	30,535	0.0137
Rajasthan	2150	80,153	0.0268
Sikkim	38	683	0.0556
Tamil Nadu	2722	76,631	0.0355
Telangana	802	37,907	0.0212
Tripura	236	4,109	0.0574
Uttarakhand	483	2,33,297	0.0021
Uttar Pradesh	2890	11,518	0.2509
West Bengal	975	98,604	0.0099
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	50	402	0.1244
Chandigarh	.	1,219	0.0000
Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu	16	1,170	0.0137
Delhi	16	20,965	0.0008
Jammu & Kashmir	904	13,505	0.0669
Ladakh	54	299	0.1806
Lakshadweep	12	68	0.1765
Puducherry	45	1,608	0.0280
Total	30640		

Source: Handbook of Statistics on Indian States

Population: Population Projection for India and States 2011-2036 (2020)

Availability of doctors per 000 population: Calculated by authors

2.1 Challenges

- **Lack of medical practitioners:** A shortage of workers continues to be a major issue even with the growth in the number of healthcare facilities (Nath *et al.*, 2021) ^[5]. It leads to long waiting hours for patients. A study by (Ansari, 2014) ^[1] revealed that in terms of physical infrastructure and workforce, India's health sector lags far behind worldwide standards, and it even lags behind those of similar developing nations. In 2006, the entire number of doctors per thousand people was just 1.27%, and India had 0.5% more doctors per thousand than the global average of 1.5. In 2006, there were 0.9% nurses for per 1,000 people, which is lower than the global average of 1.2%. In India, there were 0.9% beds per thousand people, 1.3% nurses, and 0.6 doctors per thousand in 2011.
- **Low availability of doctors per '000 population:** As we can see in Table 2, doctors available per thousand population is very low. The nation doesn't have even one doctor at PHCs per thousand people which highlights the ill standard of public healthcare system.
- **Low level of skill set of available practitioners:** Lack of training programs to doctors and nurses make them

unaware about new tools and treatment processes. Due to their low skills, there is a delay in disease diagnosis. Patients' trust in the healthcare system is also impacted by a shortage of qualified and experienced personnel (Nath *et al.*, 2021) ^[5].

2.2 Opportunities

- **Training programmes:** A provision of training and skill imparting initiatives should be made and regular training sessions must be organized in order to increase efficiency. It is necessary to educate doctors and nurses on emerging technologies and drugs.
- **Increment in seats in medical institutions:** As gov. announced in the budget 2024-2025, it will extend 10,000 new UG/PG seats in 2025-26, and targeting 75,000 seats in five years. It is a great opportunity which can result in a paradigm shift.

3. Financial Aspect

This aspect discusses the public expenditure on health. Expenditure on health in 2018-19 and 2019-20 is taken and per capita expenditure is calculated by taking projected population into consideration.

Table 3: Per capita expenditure on health

State/Union Territory	2018-19(in crores)	2019-20 (in crores)	Per capita exp 2018-19	Per capita exp 2019-20
Andhra Pradesh	7522.1	7940.9	1448.28	1520.63
Arunachal Pradesh	1118.3	1013.0	7510.40	6735.37
Assam	4663.0	5446.3	1374.78	1558.16
Bihar	7741.2	8078.5	657.48	675.91
Chhattisgarh	3830.8	4787.5	1351.72	1666.72
Goa	954.2	1097.9	6232.52	7129.22
Gujarat	10100.0	10395.9	1507.23	1531.91
Haryana	4302.3	5378.3	1522.07	1875.80
Himachal Pradesh	2378.3	2460.9	3279.05	3371.09
Jammu & Kashmir	1904.3	1882.5	1453.55	1425.81
Jharkhand	3382.2	3151.8	917.35	842.65
Karnataka	9705.1	9474.1	1486.80	1439.87
Kerala	7099.0	7539.2	2031.59	2146.39
Madhya Pradesh	7826.0	9672.7	965.10	1176.26
Maharashtra	13054.9	14755.8	1078.81	1207.97
Manipur	493.9	667.8	1607.22	2152.11
Meghalaya	1108.5	910.7	3472.74	2824.75
Mizoram	653.8	651.2	5535.98	5463.08
Nagaland	630.2	668.9	2960.07	3111.16
Odisha	5833.2	6293.0	1306.19	1398.32
Punjab	3437.2	3777.3	1160.47	1265.04
Rajasthan	12665.6	12210.7	1660.93	1580.38
Sikkim	408.5	427.1	6217.65	6350.90
Tamil Nadu	13157.8	13012.4	1746.40	1719.05
Telangana	5545.2	7303.8	1500.04	1962.33
Tripura	934.9	907.4	2365.03	2273.04
Uttar Pradesh	18344.9	20250.2	826.29	900.09
Uttarakhand	2146.4	2144.7	1948.96	1925.05
West Bengal	9982.6	11093.0	1036.64	1144.71

Source: Handbook of Statistics on Indian States

Population: Population Projection for India and States 2011-2036 (2020)

3.1 Challenges

- **Low per capita expenditure on health:** This is one of the major challenges Indian healthcare sector is facing. Government spends low percentage of its GDP as compared to other developing nations. India's overall spending on the social and health sectors has not increased in association with the substantial rise in

economic growth, per capita income, and tax revenues (Kumar *et al.*, 2011) ^[4].

- **Inter-state disparities:** A study by (Khatri & Chaudhry, 2024) ^[3] analysed disparities in Indian healthcare sector and for per capita expenditure on health, study highlighted the disparity ratio rose from 193.15 percent in 2015-16 to 291.01 percent in 2017-18, then fell to 290.99 percent in 2018-19 and then fell

to 262.36 percent in 2019-20. The disparities are exhibiting a pattern of rising and then falling, but it is clear that there are differences between states that require serious attention.

- **Low Accessibility to affordable and quality services:** The quantity of public health facilities is insufficient; for example, India has less than half the number of community health centres that are required per million people, which is 74,150. At least eleven Indian states lack drug testing labs, and over half of those that do have inadequate staffing and equipment (Ansari, 2014) ^[1].

3.2 Opportunities

- **Increase in expenditure by government:** The government's investment in infrastructure development and universal access to healthcare is the most important prerequisite for lowering health disparities (Khatri & Chaudhry, 2024) ^[3].
- **Investment in new technologies:** Investment in new technology is a potential opportunity which will improve patients' health, reduce healthcare costs & increase efficiency. Areas can be telemedicine, artificial intelligence, robotics, personalized treatment & care, etc.
- **Increase in insurance coverage:** The Indian market for health insurance has enormous potential, as fewer than 10% of the population has some form of health insurance. At least 25% of the nation's citizens were covered by health insurance as of 2010 (Ansari, 2014) ^[1].

Conclusion

Although there are many obstacles faced by India's healthcare system, including poor infrastructure, a lack of qualified workers, and a heavy reliance on out-of-pocket costs, there are also many chances for expansion and innovation. These issues can be resolved and the potential of the Indian healthcare system can be realised by utilising emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), expanding telemedicine, developing healthcare infrastructure, and raising health insurance coverage. The industry is positioned for substantial growth as a result of growing public and business awareness of health and wellness in the new Viksit Bharat.

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