

Press Release – Embargoed till 4 am IST May 26, 2021 (Wednesday)

Lancet Citizens' Commission offers eight immediate recommendations for central and state governments to address the recent COVID-19 surge in India

New Delhi, May 26, 2021: *The Lancet* [Citizens' Commission on Reimagining India's Health System](#) was launched in December 2020 with the aim of laying out a roadmap to achieving universal health coverage in India over the next decade. The Commission is an ambitious, cross-sectoral endeavor that bases its work on a participatory and consultative process with citizens and prominent stakeholders from across India's health system.

In response to the alarming resurgence of COVID-19 in India, authors drawn from the Commission and its network of fellows have proposed eight urgent recommendations in an article in *The Lancet*. These recommendations are focused on the immediate steps central and state governments must take to help curtail the loss of life and suffering caused by COVID-19 amid the recent surge in cases. The article synthesizes and amplifies the suggestions already being made by grassroots workers and experts across the country.

The recommendations span a wide gambit of actions that must be taken to manage the situation: first, the organisation and financing of essential health services must be decentralised to districts; second, there must be a transparent national pricing policy and caps on the prices of all essential health services; third, clear, evidence-based information on the management of COVID-19 be widely disseminated, including guidance on what not to do; fourth, all available human resources, including the private sector, must be marshalled for the COVID-19 response and adequately resourced and supported; fifth, central systems to procure and distribute COVID-19 vaccines free of cost should be established in a departure from the current policy of decentralised procurement through state governments; sixth, community engagement and public participation must lie at the heart of India's COVID-19 response, with no restrictions on civil society organizations to access resources; seventh, there must be transparency and sharing of government data to enable districts to proactively prepare for the likely caseloads in the coming weeks and surveillance needs to include urgent investment in genomic sequencing; finally, the profound suffering and risk to health caused by loss of livelihoods should be minimised by making provisions for cash transfers by the state to workers in India's vast informal economy who have lost their jobs and requiring businesses not to lay-off their workers.

These recommendations reflect the collective wisdom of twenty-one experts (full list of authors appended below) from India across academia, civil society, and the private sector, including many who have played leadership roles in India's health system.

The complete set of recommendations can be found here:

[http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)01202-2/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)01202-2/fulltext)

Quotes from authors:

Poonam Muttreja: “COVID-19 is the most serious crisis independent India has faced as the virus pushes its way into rural areas where 65% of India lives. We need to enable our country's innate resilience to kick in and hope that these eight steps will go a long way towards providing that support. All of us and our organizations look forward to partnering with the government and enabling our most vulnerable to survive this pandemic. The world is looking to see how India comes out of this crisis.”

Vikram Patel: “The humanitarian crisis the resurgence has precipitated requires all persons in central and state governments to set aside their political differences and work in solidarity with each other, and with civil society, to implement the eight clearly articulated recommendations in our article”.

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Note to the Editors:

This is a Comment piece in *The Lancet*, which are written by experts in the field, and represent their own views, rather than necessarily the views of *The Lancet* or any *Lancet* specialty journal. Unlike Articles containing original research, not all Comments are externally peer reviewed.

For more details on the Commission, please visit: www.citizenshealth.in.

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