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The Lakshmi Mittal and Family  
**SOUTH ASIA INSTITUTE**  
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Harvard Global Research Support Centre India



Dear Friends,

We are delighted to present to you the June edition of the monthly newsletter by the [Lancet Citizens' Commission on Reimagining India's Health System](#). This month's newsletter covers a diverse range of pressing issues in India's health sector. We explore the shortcomings of the health centers established under the Modi government and the implications of federal financing on health priorities. Discover how the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission could revolutionize healthcare, the role of digital advancements in primary health care, and the limited political commitment to health in public debate. We highlight SS Innovations' telesurgery trial, debate India's readiness for a fundamental right to health, and examine genomic surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 and various mortality rates across India.

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## Views & Opinions

### [The Modi government's much-hyped health centres are failing](#)

As [PM] Modi promised, India did create 1.5 lakh health and wellness centres, by converting existing healthcare facilities. They were subsequently renamed as Ayushman centres or Arogya Mandirs. The Arogya Mandirs were meant to take specialised healthcare to poor Indians. But they remain hobbled by unskilled doctors, lack of

medicine and staff shortage, *writes Tabassum Barnagarwala.*

(Photo credits: Tabassum Barnagarwala)

### Federal financing of health: Implications for capacity and priority

The National Health Mission helped reverse the declining trend in health spending by states by providing them with non-wage resources in the context of their low own revenues. However, health continues to be a low priority in state budgets, with the share of health spending in the total expenditure of State budgets remaining broadly unchanged over the past 30 years. Political leadership often plays a key role in determining health as a priority, *write Avani Kapur, Ritwik Shukla, Sharad Pandey, CPR and Indranil Mukhopadhyay, Janak Raj, Prajakta Shukla, & Sandhya Venkateswaran, CSEP.*

### How ABDM could revolutionise India's healthcare system

India's healthcare system grapples with fragmented patient data, leading to suboptimal care outcomes as providers often lack access to medical histories. However, the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM), initiated in 2021, has the potential to revolutionise this scenario by:

Providing unique health IDs, ABHA (Ayushman Bharat Health Account), *write Indu Bhushan and Priyanka Aggrawal.*

### Levelling primary health care in India digitally

In the 1980s, India's health care landscape underwent a seismic shift with the arrival of the country's first corporate hospital. This ushered in an era prioritising cutting-edge technology, modern infrastructure, and skilled medical professionals, all focused on delivering superior patient care. This formula sparked a revolution in tertiary care, attracting not only domestic patients but also medical tourists seeking affordable, high-quality treatment. Today, numerous hospital chains have adopted this model, fostering a nationwide rise in health care standards, *writes Dr Alexander Kuruvilla.*

### When you need medicine but can't ask for it

In the first LS election since Covid, healthcare is a non-issue on the campaign trail. Poor access to health data & non-existent feedback loops make voters feel powerless against unfulfilled promises. This is India's first general election since Covid exposed deep fractures in our health system. One thus expected political parties to make health reform and the right to health a big part of their election campaigns this time. But this is not the case. In reality, political commitments on health get little space in public scrutiny and debate. This needs to change, *write Shreyashi Ray and Rituparna Padhy.*

### **SS Innovations Unveils SSI Mantra 3, Achieves Historic Telesurgery Trial**

Access to quality healthcare and maternal care is of paramount importance especially in rural regions, as it plays a pivotal role in the well-being and development of a nation as a whole. Rural and remote areas, often face unique and pressing challenges when it comes to healthcare. In these regions, maternal health stands out as a critical concern, as it directly impacts the lives of women and their children, contributing to the overall health of the community, *writes Sujay Santra*.

## **Resources**

### **Is India ready for fundamental right to health?**

The right to health, a vital indicator of human development and thus, the economic and social development, has been an age-old phenomenon in India. Although, no explicit recognition to the right to health or healthcare has been given under the Indian constitution, the hon'ble supreme court, through various judicial interpretations, has repeatedly observed that right to health is a part of fundamental right to life and personal liberty enshrined under article 21. However, the fundamental policy question being raised in recent years is whether to guarantee health as a separate fundamental right in India.

### **Genomic Surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 in Bangalore, India 2021-2022**

A comprehensive SARS-CoV-2 genomic surveillance programme that integrates logistics, laboratory work, bioinformatics, analytics, and timely reporting was deployed through a public-private partnership in the city of Bengaluru, Karnataka in India. As a result, 13641 samples were sequenced and reported to the Karnataka state public health officials as time-sensitive, decision support from June 2021 to July 2022 and uploaded in global public databases in a timely manner. As part of the programme, an analytics platform for studying SARS-CoV-2 sequences and their epidemiological context was also developed.

### **Early-Neonatal, Late-Neonatal, Postneonatal, and Child Mortality Rates Across India, 1993-2021**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations include reducing mortality in the first 5 years to 25 deaths per 1000 live births and the first 28 days to 12 deaths per 1000 live births by 2030.<sup>1,2</sup> Nearly 5 million children throughout the world died before their fifth birthday in 2021, with 27% living in South Asia.<sup>3,4</sup> India, with a rate of 42 children younger than 5 years (under-5) deaths per 1000 live births,<sup>5</sup> accounts for 14% of the global burden of under-5 mortality.<sup>3,6</sup> Meeting the global child mortality

SDG target is therefore intrinsically tied to India's success.

## Featured Partner

**Population Foundation of India** is a leading NGO in the fields of population dynamics, gender equity, and sexual and reproductive health (SRH). It addresses population issues within the context of empowering women, men, and young people, enabling them to make informed decisions about their fertility, health, and well-being. Population Foundation of India also collaborates closely with and provides technical support to both national and state governments, as well as other NGOs.



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