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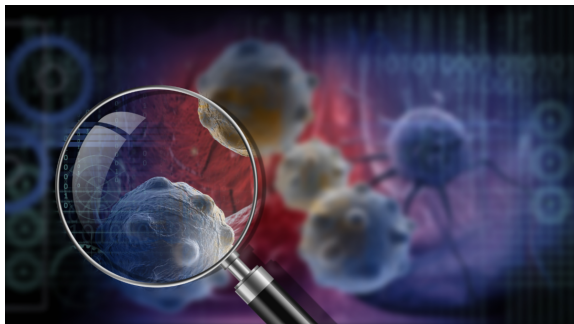


Dear Friends,

We are delighted to present to you the January edition of the monthly newsletter by the [Lancet Citizens' Commission on Reimagining India's Health System](#). This month's newsletter includes Biocon's call for tax exemptions on cancer and rare-disease drugs, insights from Dr. Gagandeep Kang on India's improved respiratory infection tracking, and a National Health Mission report outlining workforce enhancements and public health achievements. Soumya Swaminathan advocates for a regulatory body on environmental health, while Unicef monitors the health impacts of Cyclone Remal and other natural disasters. Experts discuss how India remains resilient amid global health funding uncertainties, with a spotlight on the role of tax reliefs in improving senior healthcare in the upcoming budget. Additionally, explore the intersection of health insurance and maternity care, a machine learning-based study on mental health bed occupancy forecasting, and a podcast offering an in-depth look at Kerala's healthcare system.

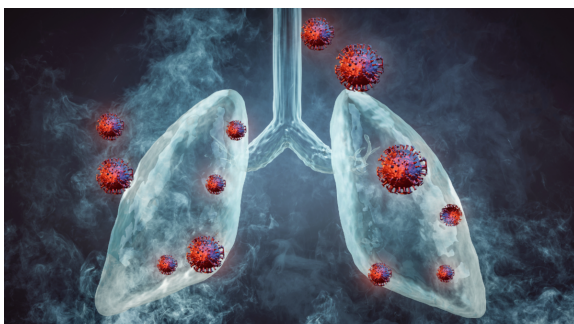
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## Views & Opinions



### [India's Biocon urges government to exempt cancer, rare-disease drugs from tax in budget](#)

India should eliminate tax on drugs for cancer treatment and for chronic and rare diseases, the chairperson of major drugmaker Biocon Ltd, said ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's budget announcement, expected next month. Drugs used for treating chronic diseases such as diabetes and cancer should be exempted from tax, Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw told Reuters. "In India most of the expenses on medicines are out of pocket - even diagnostic scans are very expensive," she said, urging the government to consider making lifesaving therapies affordable and waiving tax on them.



### [India well placed now at tracking respiratory infections; no unusual threat: Dr Gagandeep Kang](#)

"The Indian government is a lot better placed today to paint the picture on the unfolding of infectious diseases. Earlier (pre-COVID) there was no surveillance for respiratory infections. Now, the information that the government is offering about Human MetaPneumoVirus (HMPV), the new virus that is causing concern and other respiratory viruses, is actually based on data," says Dr Kang.

### [National Health Mission has enhanced workforce, curbed several public health concerns: Centre's report to Cabinet](#)

The National Health Mission (NHM) has significantly contributed to improving India's public health, including lowering of the maternal mortality rate, incidence of tuberculosis (TB), and sickle cell anaemia. It has also contributed to expanding human resources in the field while fostering an integrated response to health emergencies, the Central Government said on Wednesday (January 22, 2025) in its assessment report (2021-24) presented to the Union Cabinet on Wednesday (January 22, 2025), writes Bindu Shaman Perappadan.



### [The role of health insurance in maternity care](#)

In a country like India, where women constitute approximately 49% of the population, only a portion of those aged 15–49 were covered under health insurance between 2019 and 2021, according to data from the National Family Health Survey India report. According to media reports, doctors say that about 5% of newborns require 2-3 months of treatment in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) for serious infections, birth complications, or congenital abnormalities. This underscores the importance of maternity



insurance, which offers comprehensive financial protection for expectant mothers by covering pre- and post-natal expenses, delivery costs, and newborn care, *writes Sapna Desai.*

### [The Hindu Lit for Life 2025: Soumya Swaminathan calls for body to regulate environmental health](#)

India needs a regulatory agency for environmental health to address interconnected issues of public health, environment, said Soumya Swaminathan, Chairperson of MS Swaminathan Research Foundation, and former Chief Scientist at World Health Organization. Dr. Swaminathan [...] said the integration of data on animal and human health is essential to address interconnected challenges like zoonotic diseases, antimicrobial resistance, and food security.



### [Unicef tracks Remal, health impact of natural disasters](#)

The Sundarbans is facing severe health challenges as climate change intensifies, triggering extreme weather events. Each disaster leaves behind a trail of illnesses and health crises that affect the region's marginalised communities. Recognising the need for intervention, Unicef has launched a health initiative in the Sundarbans, aiming at addressing climate disasters' health impacts. By organising a series of health camps, the initiative ensures life-saving care for thousands, fostering a climate-resilient future for these disaster-stricken communities, *writes Krishnendu Bandhopadhyay.*



### [India Resilient To US' WHO Shake-Up, But Global Health Plans, Funding Face Uncertainty: Experts](#)

India's advanced health systems may cushion the impact of the United States' decision to exit the World Health Organization (WHO), but it may derail crucial initiatives in vulnerable regions, multiple public health experts told News18. The move was expected in 2020 as US President Donald Trump had already initiated steps to withdraw from WHO, citing the health agency's biases towards China. However, it was subsequently reversed by new President Joe Biden in January 2021, *write Himani Chandna and Apoorva Misra.*

### [Budget 2025: How tax reliefs can improve healthcare for seniors](#)

With just a few days to go for the unveiling of Budget 2025, India's elderly population, which is expected to grow by 22% in the coming six years, is eagerly waiting for the announcements and policies which may impact them. As healthcare





costs continue to increase rapidly, senior citizens in their golden years bear the brunt of expensive medical treatment coupled with limited tax relief. Several experts have shared their views on the Budget expectations for senior citizens and how it might impact their overall quality of life, *writes Jasmine Anand.*

## Resources

### [Time series forecasting of bed occupancy in mental health facilities in India using machine learning](#)

Machine learning models are vital for forecasting and optimizing healthcare parameters, especially in the context of rising mental health issues in India and globally. With increasing demand for mental health services, effective resource management, like bed occupancy forecasting, is crucial to ensure proper patient care and reduce the burden on healthcare facilities. This study applies six machine learning models, namely Support Vector Regression, eXtreme Gradient Boosting, Random Forest, K-Nearest Neighbors, Gradient Boosting, and Decision Tree, to forecast weekly bed occupancy of the second largest mental hospital in India, using data from 2008 to 2024, *write G. Avinash, Hariom Pachori, Avinash Sharma & SukhDev Mishra.*



### [A Closer Look at Health and Healthcare in Kerala](#)

In this episode of "Status of States: Insights on Health Policy across India," Vivek Diwan, Coordinator Centre for Health Equity, Law and Policy, Indian Law Society, and Dr. V Raman Kutty, Epidemiologist and Public Health Expert, take a closer look at the state of health and healthcare in Kerala. They discuss the growth of the private sector, violence against healthcare workers, decentralization of health governance, and much more.



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