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## The Lancet Commission on a Citizen-Centred Health System for India

### Newsletter

Dear Friends,

We are delighted to present to you the February edition of the monthly newsletter by [The Lancet Commission on a Citizen-Centred Health System for India](#). This month's newsletter spotlights key health announcements in Union Budget 2026–27, including a ₹1.06 lakh crore allocation, a 10% spending increase, five proposed regional medical hubs, one lakh allied health professionals, and the launch of a National AI Framework for healthcare. It captures expert responses, welcoming workforce and brain health investments while raising concerns about out-of-pocket costs and medical inflation. The edition features op-eds by Commissioners on advancing universal health coverage, strengthening quality for a future-ready system, and assessing the Budget's broader health priorities in light of the Commission's recommendations. It also recaps the Goa Policy Dialogue on the feasibility and way forward on the Commission's recommendations. If you haven't yet explored the report, we invite you to read it below.

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## News & Opinions



### [Union Budget 2026–27: Health Ministry gets ₹1.06 lakh crore allocation](#)

The Union Budget 2026–27 has accorded significant priority to the health sector, with a substantial increase in allocations for the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, reflecting the Government's continued commitment to strengthening India's healthcare system and ensuring universal access to quality medical services. Presenting the Union Budget in Parliament, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced an allocation of ₹1,06,530.42 crore for the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in 2026–27, marking an increase of nearly 10 per cent over the Revised Estimates of 2025–26. *writes Ranu Jain.*



### [Budget 2026: Experts welcome government's announcement of adding one lakh allied health professionals](#)

Several medical experts on Sunday welcomed the government's announcement of adding one lakh allied health professionals (AHPs) to the health force and setting up three new All India Institute of Ayurveda to strengthen research in the field. Many also praised the proposal in the Union Budget to launch a scheme to support states in establishing five regional medical hubs in partnership with the private sector to promote India as a medical tourism hub. These hubs will serve as integrated healthcare complexes that combine medical, educational and research facilities, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said while presenting the Budget 2026-27.



### [AI In Healthcare: Health Minister Launches National AI Framework, Testing Platform At AI Impact Summit 2026](#)

Union Health Minister Jagat Prakash Nadda on Tuesday launched two national initiatives-SAHI and BODH-to establish a regulatory and evaluation framework for the use of artificial intelligence in healthcare, stressing that AI must remain ethical, transparent and accountable. The initiatives were unveiled at the India AI Impact Summit 2026 at Bharat Mandapam. SAHI-the Secure AI for Health Initiative-has been introduced as a national roadmap, *writes Tanushka Dutta.*



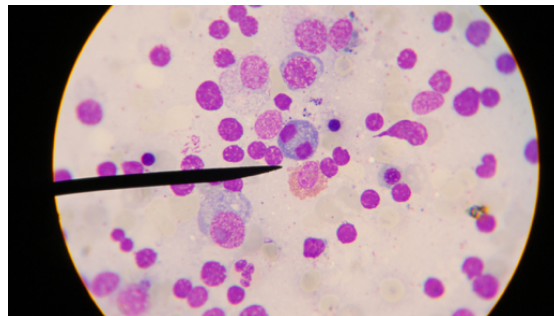
### [Union Budget 2026 does little to reduce out-of-pocket expenses, medical inflation: experts](#)

Describing the allocation for healthcare in the Union Budget 2026-27 'minimal' and 'lacking direction', most sector experts said that they expected more relief for the common man in the form of reduced out-of-pocket expenses, and strengthening of primary healthcare. Former president of the Indian Medical Association (IMA) Ravi Wankhedkar criticised the continued focus on pharmaceuticals and AYUSH at the cost of primary healthcare and public health infrastructure, warning that allocation to medical tourism initiatives would largely benefit corporate hospitals rather than ordinary citizens. "Adjusted for inflation," Dr. Wankhedkar said, "health spending has effectively declined, with paramedical training emerging as the lone long-term positive," *writes Bindu Shajan Perappadan.*



### [Budget's welcome focus on improving India's brain health](#)

Union Budget 2026 recognises brain health and human capital as a strategic asset and an important component of the mission to Viksit Bharat. The strengthening of mental health infrastructure, human resource expansion, and digital health and wellness initiatives reflects a welcome move towards a human capital-driven growth model. Economic Survey 2023-24 had first highlighted the significance of mental health in personal and national progress. The 2025-26 survey also focused on human capital in addition to flagging digital addiction as a major public health hazard as well as a risk for India's long-term productivity. Recent scientific literature also highlights digital addiction as a major hazard for India's demographic dividend and growth potential, *writes Rajinder K Dhamija.*



### [Union Budget 2026-27: What are the major announcements for health sector?](#)

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, presenting her 9th budget on February 1, 2026, announced that the centre will be launching a Biopharma Shakti scheme to make India a global biopharma hub. With an outlay of Rs 10,000 crore over five years, the scheme will focus on biologicals, biosimilars and non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, cancer and autoimmune disorders, Sitharaman noted. SHAKTI stands for 'Strategy for Healthcare Advancement through Knowledge, Technology and Innovation'. Under the scheme, three new National Institutes of Pharmaceutical Education and Research will be set up and the existing seven will be upgraded, *write Preetha Banerjee and Snigdha Das.*

## Op-eds from the Commission



### [Universal health care is now in sight](#)

The recently released report from the Lancet Commission calls for 'a citizen-centred and technology driven system' for Universal Health Care (UHC) in India. Lack of UHC is a worrying problem for a country of 1.4 billion people from various socio-economic groups, large diversity in health care access and under-capacity in health-care infrastructure. Yet, we contend that UHC is now in sight for India. We want to highlight three reasons for this. First, digital solutions at scale are now feasible in India and assistive AI technology is fast-



### [To be future ready, healthcare system has to ensure quality](#)

With the Lancet Commission on Reimagining India's Health System being launched last month, it is worth pausing to ask: Are we building a health system for yesterday's diseases or tomorrow's India? Soon after Ayushman Bharat was rolled out, a beneficiary asked me something that has stayed with me: "Card toh mil gaya hai, par ilaaj ka raasta kaun dikhayega (We have got the card, but who will guide us towards treatment)?" That goes to the heart of India's health challenge — not just paying for care, but ensuring that people

maturing. Second, India has been building significant prowess in research in drugs, vaccines, diagnostics, medical devices together with an industrial base in large-scale manufacturing. Third, we are learning how to build so-called non-profit unicorns, those that have population-scale impact, *write Varun Aggarwal, Vijay Chandru, and Tarun Khanna.*

are guided through the system with dignity and continuity. As the founding CEO of Ayushman Bharat, I have seen both the promise and the limits of health reform at close quarters. When the scheme was launched, many doubted whether India could pull off the world's largest government-funded health assurance programme, *writes Indu Bhushan.*



**Union Budget | Big numbers, small gains for women**

[...] The Lancet [Commission on a Citizen-Centred Health System for India], of which this author was a commissioner, conducted a nationwide survey in 2022-2023 that produced telling results. While public healthcare remains the main source of care for most households - with 65 per cent preferring public facilities for outpatient services and 73 per cent for inpatient care - only 28 per cent report feeling financially protected against health-related expenses. Women bear the brunt of this gap: they are more likely to delay care, absorb rising household debt, and shoulder the burden of unpaid caregiving, especially given abysmal male involvement in household work. Chronic underinvestment in women's health, therefore, is not merely a fiscal failure; it is a democratic one, *writes Poonam Muttreja.*

**Another kind of Acche Din**

[...] The January 2026 Lancet Commission on a citizen-centred health system for India' report makes this diagnosis even sharper: The commission identified fragmented delivery, rigid financing and weak learning capacity the biggest constraints of India's healthcare system. Its prescription is explicitly capability-first. Integrated primary care, strategic purchasing and the use of India Stack-style digital public infrastructure (interoperable health records, unique patient identifiers, telemedicine and real-time data) to enable coordination, accountability and adaptation at scale. In this sense, the budget's stated shift from transfers to capacity is analytically correct. Where the gap remains is execution. Outcomes are still weakly specified and weakly enforced. That gap is also the lowest-hanging fruit, *write Tarun Khanna and Aditya Sinha.*

**Highlights from the Goa event**

The Goa Institute of Management's Centre for Health Systems Design & Management hosted a Policy Dialogue on 6 February 2026 to discuss the Lancet Commission's recommendations under Reimagining India's Health System towards Viksit Bharat @2047.

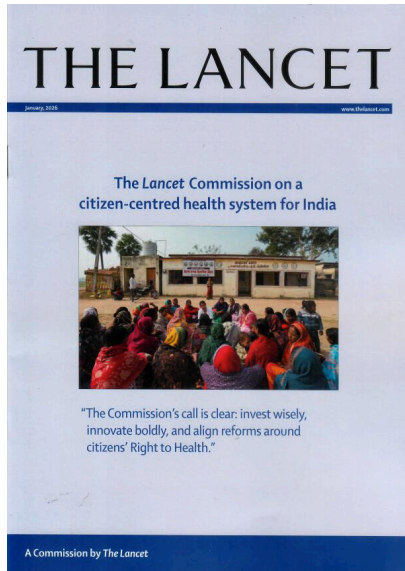
Dr Shaheen K. Saiyed, Directorate of Health Services, Government of Goa, reflected on progress toward UHC, while Prof. Vikram Patel, Commission



Co-Chair, outlined a citizen-centred vision.



Three panels examined public financing, private sector alignment, digital innovation, and learning health systems. Approximately 140 participants attended.



### After 5 years of extensive research, **The Lancet Commission on a Citizen-Centred Health System for India report is here!**

The report proposes a transformative approach to India's health system by placing the needs of citizens front and centre. The report's authors emphasise the urgent need to strengthen India's public healthcare and identify a several health system reforms needed to advance Universal Health Coverage. The Commission advocates for a rights-based, citizen-centred model that promotes community participation, transparency, and equity—key principles of UHC—aimed at ensuring high-quality, affordable care for all.

[Read the Report](#)



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