



HEALTH EQUITY - GS II MAINS

Q. India is undergoing a phase of its own demographic transition. Critically analyse the opportunities pose by it to the Indian economy. (10 marks, 150 words)

News: Shaping India's path to inclusive health care

What's in the news?

- World Health Day, celebrated every year on April 7, serves as a poignant reminder of the significance of health equity, which the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared as a fundamental human right.

Health Equity:

- Health equity is defined by the WHO, entails ensuring that every individual has the opportunity to attain their highest level of health, irrespective of their social, economic, or environmental circumstances.

Scope of Health Equity:

- It extends beyond mere access to healthcare services to encompass addressing underlying determinants of health disparities.
- Recognition of Health Outcomes: Health outcomes are influenced by various factors, including social, economic, and environmental determinants. Individuals from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds often encounter barriers to healthcare access, such as financial constraints and limited availability of healthcare facilities.

Significance of Health Equity:

1. Moral and Public Health Perspective:

- Health equity is crucial not only from moral and ethical standpoints but also from a public health perspective.
- Research indicates that populations with greater health equity experience better overall health outcomes, lower healthcare costs, and increased life expectancy.

2. Impact of Inequities:

- Persistent health inequities can lead to societal instability, economic burden, and diminished human potential.

Health Equity Challenges in India:

1. Urban-Rural Disparities:

- India faces significant healthcare access and outcome disparities between urban and rural areas, with rural communities often experiencing poorer health outcomes due to limited healthcare infrastructure and services.



2. Overcrowded Urban Slums:

- Urban slums in India are characterized by extreme poverty, poor sanitation, and limited access to healthcare facilities, leading to higher morbidity and mortality rates among slum dwellers.

3. Socio-economic and Caste Disparities:

- Marginalized groups, including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and economically disadvantaged populations, experience higher rates of morbidity and mortality due to limited healthcare access and social discrimination.

4. Burden of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs):

- NCDs pose a growing challenge to health equity in India, with limited access to preventive services and treatment exacerbating disparities in health outcomes.

5. Shortage of Healthcare Professionals:

- A critical shortage of doctors, particularly in rural areas, hampers access to primary healthcare services, leading to delayed diagnosis and inadequate treatment.

6. Infrastructure and Resource Constraints:

- Inadequate healthcare infrastructure, limited funding, and resource constraints pose significant challenges to health equity in India, with many public healthcare facilities lacking essential equipment and trained staff.

Global Challenges:

1. Pandemic Risks:

- The battle for health equity faces global hurdles requiring unified international efforts.
- COVID-19 has starkly highlighted how infectious diseases disproportionately affect marginalised groups, widening health disparities.

2. Climate Change Concerns:

- Climate change poses grave health risks, particularly affecting low-income and vulnerable populations.
- Conflicts further hinder healthcare access by damaging infrastructure and displacing communities, thus restricting vital medical services.

Measures to Address Health Equity in India:

1. Strengthening Primary Healthcare:

- Improving the availability and accessibility of primary care facilities, enhancing the skills of frontline healthcare workers, and ensuring the provision of essential health services are key strategies.

2. Promoting Universal Health Coverage:



- Initiatives like Ayushman Bharat aim to provide financial protection to vulnerable populations by offering cashless coverage for hospitalization expenses.

3. Addressing Social Determinants of Health:

- Poverty alleviation, improving access to education and sanitation, and creating livelihood opportunities are essential for reducing health disparities.

4. Promoting Health Literacy:

- Integrating health education into existing healthcare programs can enhance public awareness and promote preventive healthcare practices.

5. Strengthening Collaborations:

- Effective collaboration among governments, civil society, healthcare providers, and international organizations is crucial for addressing health inequities.

6. Increasing Allocation as Percentage of GDP:

- Budgetary allocations for public health in India slightly increased to approximately 1.35% of GDP in fiscal year 2020.
- Recommendations aim to raise this to 2.5% by 2025, focusing on expanding coverage for the “missing middle” without health insurance.

Promoting health equity in India requires concerted efforts across multiple sectors and stakeholders. By addressing socioeconomic determinants of health, strengthening healthcare infrastructure, and fostering collaborative partnerships, India can ensure access to high-quality healthcare for all its citizens. Achieving health equity is essential for sustainable development and social progress.