

7th – Role of the Government In Health



In a democracy people expect the government to work their welfare. This could be through the provision of education, health, employment, housing or the development of roads, electricity etc.

What is health: Health means or ability to remain free of illness and injuries. But health isn't only about disease. Apart from disease, we need to think of other factors that affect our health. For example, if people get clean drinking water or a pollution free environment they are likely to be healthy. On the other hand, if people do not get adequate food to eat or have to live in cramped conditions, they will be prone to illness.

Healthcare in India: In order to prevent and treat illnesses we need appropriate healthcare facilities such as health centers, hospitals, laboratories for testing, ambulance services, blood banks, etc. that can provide the required care and services that patient need. India has a large number of doctors, clinics and hospitals. The country also has considerable experience and knowledge in running a public healthcare system. This is a system of hospitals and health centers run by the government. However, the questions arises that how poor the health situation in our country is? With all the above positive developments we are not able to provide proper healthcare facilities to people. This is the paradox- something that is contrary to what we would expect. Our country has the money, knowledge and people with experience but cannot make the necessary healthcare available to all.

Public And Private Healthcare Services: From the above story, you must have understood that we can roughly divide up various healthcare facilities in two categories.

- a) Public health service
- b) Private health service

Public health services: The public health service is a chain of health centers and hospitals run by the government. They are linked together so that they cover both rural and urban areas and can also provide treatment to all kinds of problems- from common illnesses to special services. The health services are called 'public' for many reasons. In order to fulfill its commitment of providing healthcare to all citizens, the government has established these hospitals and health centers. Also, the resources needed to run these services are obtained from the money that we, the public, pay to the government as taxes. Hence, such facilities are meant for everyone. One of the most important aspects of the public health system is that it is a meant to provide quality healthcare services either free or at a low cost, so that even the poor can seek treatment.

Private health facilities: There is a wide range of private health facilities that exist in our country. A large number of doctors run their own private clinics. In the rural areas, one finds registered medical practitioners (RMPs). Urban areas have large number of doctors, many of them providing specialized services. There are hospitals and nursing homes that are privately owned. There are many laboratories that do tests and offer special facilities such as X-ray, ultrasound, etc. private health facilities are not owned or controlled by the government.

Healthcare and equality: Is adequate healthcare available to all?

In India, we face a situation where private services are increasing but public services are not. What is then available to people are mainly private services. These are concentrated in urban areas. As these services are run for profit, the

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cost of these services is rather high. Medicines are expensive. Many people cannot afford them or have to borrow money when there is an illness in the family. In order to earn more money, these private services encourage practices that are incorrect. At times cheaper methods, though available, are not used. In fact barely 20 per cent of the population can afford all the medicines that they require during an illness. For those who are poor, every illness in the family is a cause of great anxiety and distress. What is worse is that this situation tends to happen again and again. Those who are poor are in the first place undernourished. These families are not eating as much as they should. They are not provided basic necessities like drinking water, adequate housing clean surroundings, etc. and therefore, are more likely to fall ill. The expenses on illness make their situation even worse. Sometimes it is not only the lack of money that prevents people from getting proper medical treatment. For example women's health concerns are considered to be less important than the health of men in the family.

What can be done: It is the responsibility of the government to provide quality healthcare services to all its citizens, especially the poor and the disadvantaged. However, health is as much dependents on basic amenities and social conditions of the people, as it is on healthcare services. Hence, it is important to work on both in order to improve the health situation of our people.

The Costa Rican approach: Costa Rica is considered to be one of the healthiest countries in South America. Costa Rica took a very important decision and decided not to have an army. This helped the Costa Rican government to spend the money that the army would have used, on health, education and other basic needs of the people. The Costa Rican government believes that a country has to be healthy for its development and pays a lot of attention to the health of its people. The Costa Rican government provides basic services and amenities to all Costa Rican. For example it provides safe drinking water, sanitation, nutrition and housing. Health education is also considered very important and knowledge about health is an essential part of education at all levels.

Universal Adult Franchise: Universal Adult Franchise means that all adults have the right to vote irrespective of their race, sex, religion, economic or social status. The right to vote was not always a universal right. In the early democracies, only some people were allowed to vote. For example, in the United Kingdom only male landowners were allowed to vote even females were not allowed to vote earlier.

Elections: Elections are the process by which the citizens of a democracy select or choose their representatives. Democracies run on the principle of one vote per person. When a member of parliament or state legislature dies in office, or resigns, elections are held in his or her constituency before the completion of five years. This is called a bye election. If for certain reasons, the president, on the advice of the prime minister, dissolves the Lok Sabha or a state assembly, elections will be conducted ahead of five years. This is called mid-term election.

Requirements for fair elections

- All citizens should have only one vote and all votes should carry the same value.
- If people have to vote, they should have choices.
- Elections should be conducted in an atmosphere free of fear or violence.

Election Commission



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In India, this is done by the Election Commission. This is an independent body that is answerable only to the parliament. The head of this body is the Chief Election Commissioner, who is appointed by the president of India.

Electoral Constituencies

In India, To make elections representative, each state is usually divided into a number of small units called constituencies. Some seats are reserved for people from more disadvantaged backgrounds, like people from scheduled castes and tribes. They are people who have been discriminated against for generations due to the caste system. Many of them continue to be discriminated against.

Election Campaigns

The Chief Election Commissioner then announces the dates for the next elections. The Election Commission also allots symbols for different political parties. Each party holds meetings to select their candidates, decide what their election manifesto would be, arrange for funds and plan their course of action for campaigns. They then launch their election campaign.

The process of election-polling

On the appointed day, people go to polling booth allotted to them, to cast their votes. Nobody, except the person who votes, knows who he or she has voted for. This is called secret ballot.

Declaration of results

After the elections are over, the election commission's next job is the counting of votes and the announcement of the names of the successful candidates.

Absolute and simple majority

In a democratic election, candidates can win by either absolute majority or by simple majority. When a candidate secures more than half of the votes polled, he or she is said to have won by an absolute majority. However, sometimes, the votes polled may be divided in such a way that none of the candidates may get an absolute majority. In such a case the person who gets the most votes, even if it is only one more than that won by his rival, is declared the winner by simple majority.

Formation of government: The party that wins the majority of seats gets qualified to form the government. The party meets to elect a leader from among the successful candidates. This leader would become the next prime minister of India.

Political parties: A political party is a group of people who voluntarily decide to enter politics and who aspire to run the government if elected to power. Countries around the world have different party systems. China has a single party system. All the candidates are from the same party. The United States of America and the United Kingdom, have the two party systems. In the USA, people choose candidates from either the Democratic Party or the Republic Party. Countries like India have a multi-party system. Here the electorate can choose from several parties, each with its own agenda, or plan of action, for tackling issues facing the nation.

Coalition government: Sometimes no single party gets a majority. On such occasions, two or more parties join together and stake their claim to form a government. This is called coalition government.

