

## Budget 2026 signals new opportunities for India's healthcare sector

The Union Budget 2026 strengthened India's healthcare ecosystem through increased investment, innovation and improved access to care. With the healthcare allocation crossing ₹1 lakh crore for the first time, the budget signalled a shift from welfare-driven spending toward long-term capacity building across the healthcare value chain. Industry leaders and healthcare experts noted that the measures aimed to support infrastructure expansion, technology adoption, and domestic manufacturing.

A key announcement was the ₹10,000 crore Biopharma Shakti initiative, designed to boost research, biologics manufacturing, and clinical innovation while positioning India as a global biopharma hub. The plan also included the creation of 1,000 accredited clinical trial sites, strengthening regulatory systems, and upgrading institutions such as NIPERs to support scientific research and innovation.

The budget also focused on improving healthcare delivery and workforce capacity. Initiatives included training one lakh allied health professionals and 1.5 lakh caregivers, expanding medical education, and strengthening district-level emergency and trauma care. Experts stated that these measures would help address manpower shortages and improve service quality across hospitals and diagnostic networks.

Additional announcements, such as customs duty exemptions on life-saving drugs, development of regional medical tourism hubs, and investments in digital health and diagnostics, were expected to enhance affordability, boost innovation, and attract investment. Overall, stakeholders said the budget reflected a broader shift toward preventive, technology-driven, and globally competitive healthcare.





## Common diabetes test may not be reliable for many Indians: Study

A recent analysis published in *Lancet Regional Health – Southeast Asia* warned that the widely used HbA1c blood test for diagnosing and monitoring diabetes may have produced misleading results for millions of people across South Asia, particularly in India. Researchers highlighted that the test, which measures average blood glucose by assessing haemoglobin glycation, could either underestimate or overestimate true blood sugar levels in individuals affected by conditions that impact red blood cells, such as iron deficiency anaemia, haemoglobinopathies, and glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase (G6PD) deficiency.

The review, led by endocrinologist Prof Anoop Misra, noted that in regions like India, where nutritional anaemia and inherited blood disorders are common, relying solely on HbA1c could have led to misclassification of diabetes status. The authors pointed out that iron deficiency anaemia affects a significant portion of the population in several parts of the country, potentially distorting HbA1c readings and complicating diabetes diagnosis and long-term monitoring.

Experts also stated that undetected G6PD deficiency in men could delay diabetes diagnosis by several years, increasing the risk of complications. In addition, variations in laboratory quality and the high prevalence of blood disorders in rural and tribal regions may have further affected test accuracy.

The review recommended a more comprehensive diagnostic approach, combining HbA1c with glucose-based tests such as oral glucose tolerance tests (OGTT), self-monitoring of blood glucose, and additional biomarkers to ensure more accurate diabetes diagnosis and management.



## Traditional medicine gains momentum in global healthcare

On 18th February 2026, Ayush Minister Prataprao Jadhav said that rising lifestyle disorders, stress and mental health challenges worldwide had increased the need for preventive and holistic healthcare solutions, highlighting that Ayush systems offer evidence-supported approaches integrating body, mind, and environment. He made the remarks while inaugurating and addressing the valedictory session of the 3rd International Ayush Conference and Exhibition (IACE 2026) held in Dubai, which officials described as an important milestone in the growing global acceptance of traditional and integrative healthcare systems.

During his address to dignitaries, researchers, industry leaders, and practitioners from around the world, Mr. Jadhav noted that Ayush systems, Ayurveda, Yoga, Siddha, Unani, and Homoeopathy, were increasingly being recognised as holistic healthcare approaches that support physical, mental, and social wellbeing while maintaining harmony with nature. The three-day conference brought together participants from 28 countries, who engaged in consultations, scientific discussions, and partnerships, reflecting the rising global interest in traditional medicine.

One of the key outcomes of the conference was deliberations on a draft international white paper on Ayush interventions for mind-body health. The document aimed to shift the global understanding of traditional medicine from experience-based practices to evidence-based validation and structured treatment protocols within integrated healthcare systems.

Mr. Jadhav also stressed the need for quality assurance, pharmacopeial standards, and international certification to enhance global acceptance of Ayush products and services while strengthening collaboration in preventive healthcare.



## ICMR strengthens research collaboration through SANVAD 2026

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), under the Department of Health Research (DHR), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, organised SANVAD 2026 (Scholars' Assembly for Next-gen Ventures to Advance their Development) from 19th to 21st February at the ICMR–National Institute of Malaria Research (NIMR) in New Delhi. The annual initiative served as a national platform designed to strengthen engagement with doctoral scholars across ICMR institutes while promoting research collaboration and exposure to diverse scientific ecosystems.

The three-day programme brought together nearly 400 doctoral scholars, along with senior scientists, policymakers, academicians, and research leaders from across the country. SANVAD aimed to improve the quality of doctoral research, encourage innovation and leadership among young researchers, and strengthen India's research and knowledge ecosystem through structured networking and interaction with experts from academia, industry, and policy.

Several distinguished speakers addressed the gathering. Prof Anil Kumar Gupta encouraged scholars to focus on research rooted in societal needs and grassroots innovation, while experts highlighted the importance of translating scientific knowledge into real-world community impact. Technical sessions also emphasised the role of health communication in ensuring research informs policy, builds public trust, and reaches communities effectively.

An interactive town hall with Dr. Rajiv Bahl, Secretary, Department of Health Research and Director General of ICMR, discussed science-policy linkages, research funding, and opportunities for young investigators. The event concluded with a valedictory session and awards recognising outstanding research contributions.

## Rising stroke cases among Indians under 45, Study finds

A recent analysis from India's largest hospital-based stroke registry found that one in seven stroke patients in the country was younger than 45 years, highlighting a growing burden of stroke among younger adults. The findings were published in the International Journal of Stroke and were based on a study led by Prashant Mathur of the ICMR–National Centre for Disease Informatics and Research (ICMR-NCDIR), Bengaluru, along with investigators from the National Stroke Registry Programme.

The analysis reviewed 34,792 stroke cases recorded across 30 hospitals between 2020 and 2022, offering a detailed national overview of stroke patterns, treatment gaps, and outcomes. The average age of patients was 59.4 years, with 13.8% under 45 years. Most patients were men (63.4%), and a large proportion came from rural areas (72.1%), reflecting disparities in awareness, prevention, and access to timely care.

Hypertension emerged as the most common risk factor, affecting 74.5% of patients, followed by diabetes, tobacco use, and alcohol consumption. However, delays in reaching hospitals remained a major challenge. Only 20% of patients arrived within the critical 4.5-hour window for emergency stroke treatment, while nearly 38% reached hospitals after 24 hours, limiting treatment options.

The study also reported that outcomes remained severe, with 28% of patients dying within three months and more than half experiencing death or significant disability, underscoring the need for improved prevention, faster referrals, and better stroke care access.





## India pushes forward with late-stage dengue vaccine trials

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## India rolls out national HPV vaccine drive for adolescent girls

On 28th February 2026, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched a nationwide Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination campaign for 14-year-old girls from Ajmer, Rajasthan, in a major step aimed at reducing the burden of cervical cancer in India. The programme sought to prevent the disease at its source by providing a free, voluntary, single-dose HPV vaccine through government health facilities across the country. Officials highlighted that cervical cancer remained the second most common cancer among women in India, with over 1.2 lakh new cases and nearly 80,000 deaths reported annually.

The campaign targeted an estimated 1.2 crore girls each year and was initially implemented in a 90-day mission mode, after which the vaccination would be integrated into routine immunisation services. Vaccination was conducted at public health facilities, including primary health centres, community health centres, district hospitals, and government medical colleges, with parental or guardian consent required before administration.

Medical experts noted that cervical cancer was primarily caused by persistent infection with high-risk HPV strains, particularly types 16 and 18, and that vaccinating girls before exposure to the virus remained the most effective preventive strategy. Authorities also emphasised that the vaccine had been validated by global and national scientific bodies, including the World Health Organization and India's National Technical Advisory Group on Immunization, confirming its safety and effectiveness. Health officials added that widespread immunisation could significantly reduce HPV transmission and support India's long-term goal of eliminating cervical cancer.



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