

Revision Notes
Chapter – 2
Role of the Government in Health

What is Health?

Health means our ability to remain free of illness and injuries. It refers to both mental and physical health. A healthy body is able to operate and function freely and efficiently. Good health makes us appreciate life more.

Healthcare in India:

- (i) India has the largest number of medical colleges in the world and is among the largest producer of doctors.
- (ii) India is the fourth largest producer of medicines in the world.
- (iii) Most doctors settle in urban areas, while people in rural areas have to travel long distance for medical facilities.
- (iv) About 5 lakh people die from tuberculosis every year, while 2 million cases of malaria are reported every year.
- (v) Healthcare facilities have grown.
- (vi) India gets a large number of medical tourists in the world. They come to avail good quality medical facilities.
- (vii) We are not able to provide good clean drinking water to all. Hence, many people suffer from communicable water-borne diseases.
- (viii) Half of the children in India do not get adequate food and are undernourished.

Private and Public Healthcare:

- (i) Healthcare is divided into two categories: Public health services and private health services.

- Public health services are a chain of health centres and hospitals run by the government.
 - One important aspect of public health is that it is meant to provide quality healthcare services either free or at low cost so that even the poor can seek treatment.
 - At the village level, there are health centres where there is usually a nurse and a village health worker. They are trained in dealing with common illnesses and work under the supervision of doctors at the Primary Health Centre (PHC). Such a centre covers many villages in a rural area. At the district level is the District Hospital that also supervises all the health centres. Large cities have many government hospitals.
 - Another important function of public health is to take action to prevent the spread of diseases such as TB, malaria, jaundice, cholera, etc.
 - According to our Constitution, it is the primary duty of the government to ensure the welfare of the people and provide health care facilities to all. The government must safeguard the Right to Life of every person.
- Private health services are not owned or controlled by the government. People have to pay a lot of money for every service that they use.
 - 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 specialised 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. There are also shops from where we buy medicines.

Healthcare and Equality:

- (i) In India, private health services are increasing but public health services are not. As cost of these private services is high, many people cannot afford them.
- (ii) Private services sometime encourage practices which are unethical. Barely 20% of the Indian population can afford medicines that they require during an illness.
- (iii) It is the responsibility of the government to provide quality healthcare services to all its citizens, especially the poor and the disadvantaged.

(iv) In 1996, the Kerala government made some major changes in the state.

- Forty per cent of the entire state budget was given to panchayats. They could plan and provide for their requirements.
- This made it possible for a village to make sure that proper planning was done for water, food, women's development and education.
- Water supply schemes were checked, the working of schools and anganwadis was ensured and specific problems of the village were taken up. Health centres were also improved.

(v) The best example of healthcare comes from Costa Rica where the government provides for adequate healthcare to people.

- Several years ago, 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 Ricans. For example, it provides safe drinking water, sanitation, nutrition and housing.