

## EDITORIAL

# Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra: The Health Perspective

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In 2023, India became the most populated country in the world with a population of 1.42 billion, providing it potential for significant economic growth by leveraging the demographic dividend.(1,2) As India becomes the global super power that the nation has potential to be, it is imperative to prioritize the well-being of the citizens. The government, being the elected representative body of people, holds the responsibility for ensuring the welfare of the masses. The Government of India periodically introduces welfare programs to cater to a diverse spectrum of the population.(3) As per the 2022 Union Budget, there are 740 central sector schemes.(4) The effectiveness of any program lies in its ability to reach its eligible beneficiaries. Unfortunately, several welfare schemes provided by the government do not reach its eligible recipients due to lack of awareness.(5) An information drought occurs, especially in rural areas despite the government's best efforts in creating awareness through radio, TV, print or online media.(6)

Recognizing the importance of awareness generation for improved uptake of welfare schemes, the Government of India has launched the "**Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra (VBSY)**". It was flagged off by the honorable Prime Minister on November 15, 2023 with the

aim of generating awareness regarding the Central government's welfare schemes and policies and to achieve 100% saturation of flagship government schemes.(7) It is to ensure maximum utilization of government schemes, and ultimately delivering their benefits to citizens across the nation, even at the remotest corner of the country.

In order to focus on health and well-being of the nation, during VSBY, health camps are being conducted. Ayushman cards are being created using the Ayushman App under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojna (AB-PMJAY) and physical cards are distributed to the beneficiaries. In 2019-20, it was seen that out-of-pocket expenditure had declined to 47.1% of total health expenditure from 62.6% in 2014-15 and AB-PMJAY is considered as an important contributor to this improvement.(8) Through VSBY, eligible beneficiaries who were left out due to various reasons like lack of awareness or poor accessibility will benefit enormously. This will help India move closer to achieve the goal of Universal Health Coverage.

In view of India's aim of achieving TB elimination by 2025, screening for tuberculosis is being done during VSBY.(9) Under Pradhan Mantri TB Mukta Bharat Abhiyan (PMTBMA), consent is being taken from patients suffering

from TB for receiving assistance from Nikshay Mitras. Attendees willing to be Nikshay Mitras are also provided on-spot registration. Under Nikshay Poshan Yojna (NPY), monetary assistance is provided to TB patients through Direct Benefit Transfer. For this purpose, details of bank account of the pending beneficiaries are being collected and accounts are being Aadhaar seeded.

Screening for hypertension and diabetes are being done during VSBY and patients are referred to higher public health facilities if required. Non-communicable diseases contribute to around 66% of deaths in adults in India.(10) Early detection by screening is vital for reducing morbidity and mortality.

The sickle gene is widespread among many tribal population groups in India with prevalence of heterozygotes varying from 1-40 per cent.(11) During VSBY, screening for sickle cell anemia is done in endemic and tribal areas for eligible population (up to 40 years of age) through the Point of Care (PoC) tests for sickle cell disease (SCD) or through Solubility Test. Cases testing positive are being referred to higher centres for management.

Along with services related to health, VSBY also focuses on other schemes through coordination with other ministries. Supply of safe water through “Har Ghar Jal scheme”, LPG cylinders via “Ujjwala scheme” and promotion of sanitation via “Swachh Bharat” initiative are some of the schemes under other sectors with major impact on health and well-being. Mobile vans with LED screens and audiovisuals are being used to create awareness. VBSK engages community workers and volunteers to identify the beneficiaries and strives for equity. Under the “Meri Kahani Meri Zubani” component of VSBY, beneficiaries from the community share the impact of government schemes, thereby encouraging others to enrol for the same. Thus, VSBY truly encompasses the four principles of primary health care- equitable distribution, intersectoral coordination, community participation and appropriate technology.

As of December 14, 2023, VSBY had over 2 crore participants in less than a month.(12) The Yatra has reached nearly 60,000 Gram Panchayats, propelling progress and advancement in every corner of the nation. As part of the Yatra's "Meri Kahani, Meri Zubani" initiative, over 1.30 Crore people have shared their personal narratives, showcasing citizens' diverse experiences and aspirations nationwide. More than 42 Lakh people have been screened during VSBY so far.

VSBY has achieved significant success but ensuring sustainability is crucial for long term outcomes. Without it, this initiative risks becoming a one-time endeavour and persistent issues such as lack of awareness and difficulty in access will continue to impede the utilization of government programs.

Thus, Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra is a crucial element in the vision to transform India into a healthy developed nation by 2047 when the country will be celebrating the centenary of its freedom.

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