

# India's Poor Record in Healthcare

Health being one of the important factors for the development of the country is to be taken care of properly. If people will be healthy it will have multidirectional effect in keeping the atmosphere in the society conducive to the development of the country. Students being healthy will study in a better way and will become an asset for the country. If youth will be healthy they will work efficiently and will be more productive and add to the GDP of the country. If women will be healthy they will take care of the children and home in a better way. If people will be healthy they will have more time to work and more energetically. They will save money and time for not spending in taking care of health of their own and that of the family members.

But the present scenario with respect to health in India is not good. The new research by 'Lancet' shows that India is lagging behind with many countries poorer and underdeveloped countries as shown in Chart 1. India should increase its expenditure on health (as being only 5% of GDP in 2015) less than many small countries (Chart 3).

**A new research by 'Lancet' shows India ranks 154 out of 195 countries in terms of access to healthcare, which is worse than Bangladesh, Nepal, Ghana and Liberia**

Why is it that the world's fastest growing major economy ranks below much poorer nations such as Bangladesh, Nepal, Ghana and even Liberia when it comes to healthcare for its masses? Last week, new research by medical journal *Lancet*, on the basis of data from the Global Burden of Disease report, 2015, said that India ranked 154 out of 195 countries in terms of access to healthcare.

**India has failed to achieve in healthcare goals, badly lagging behind China, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh in terms of accessibility and quality, as per the new Global Burden of Disease study published in the medical journal Lancet.**

**India was ranked 154th position in the ranking of healthcare quality amongst 195 countries, whereas some countries like South Korea, Peru and China have seen greatest improvements in healthcare access and quality since 1990.**

**China, with a score of 74 on the index, has been ranked at 82 - far ahead of India, and Sri Lanka has scored 73 on the index. Similarly, Brazil and Bangladesh have score 65 and 52 respectively.**

**The report also shows that India performed worse than expected in tuberculosis, diabetes, rheumatic heart diseases and chronic kidney disease.**

"Despite improvements in healthcare quality and access over 25 years, inequality between the best and worst performing countries has grown," said Christopher Murray, director of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington, and leader of a consortium of hundreds of contributing experts.

Furthermore, he added in a statement, the standard of primary care was lower in many nations than expected given levels of wealth and development.

Countries with the highest scores in 2015 include Canada, Australia, Japan and much of Europe.

Among rich nations, the worst offender in this category was the United States, which finished 35<sup>th</sup>. Within Europe, Britain ranked well below expected levels at 30th.

Consider chart 1, which lists India and 14 other countries that have higher scores than India on the Healthcare Access and Quality Index. India has the highest per capita income of all the countries in the chart, but it ranks last on the healthcare index.

**Chart 1**  
**MAN DOES NOT LIVE BY GDP ALONE**  
 Countries far poorer than India have better health indicators.

	GDP per capita (PPP constant 2011 international \$)		Healthcare Access and Quality Index		Life expectancy at birth (in years)		Neonatal mortality (per 100,000 live births)	
	2015	Rank	2015	Rank	2015	Rank	2015	Rank
India	5,733.5	1	44.8	15	68	9	28	14
Bangladesh	3,136.6	10	51.7	7	72	4	23	11
Nepal	2,312.4	14	50.8	8	70	6	22	9
Cambodia	3,278.2	8	50.7	9	69	8	15	5
Vietnam	5,667.4	3	66.3	1	76	1	11	2
Honduras	4,785.4	6	53.9	6	73	3	11	2
Nicaragua	4,884.2	5	64.3	2	75	2	10	1
Kenya	2,901	11	48.7	12	62	13	22	9
Tanzania	2,510	13	49.9	10	65	12	19	6
Liberia	784.6	15	45.4	14	61	14	24	12
Ghana	3,954.5	7	49.7	11	61	14	28	14
Tajikistan	2,661.4	12	58.6	5	70	6	21	8
Uzbekistan	5,716.5	2	62.3	3	68	9	20	7
Kyrgyz Republic	3,224.9	9	60.4	4	71	5	12	4
Myanmar	4,930.6	4	48.4	13	66	11	26	13

Source: Lancet, World Bank indicators

Bangladesh, for example, has per capita income slightly more than half of India's. Yet, it ranks seventh among these 15 nations on the healthcare index, Nepal, even poorer than Bangladesh, ranks eighth. Vietnam, which ranks third among these 15 countries in GDP (gross domestic product) per capita, ranks first in the healthcare index. But perhaps the most telling statistic is that Liberia, with a per capita GDP less than one-seventh of India's, does better than India on the healthcare index.

The healthcare data raises a host of questions. Why is it that communist and ex-communist countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyz Republic do so well on healthcare? Does the communist ideology make a difference? What accounts for Nicaragua's superior health record—is this too a reflection of left-wing rule in that country? How does one account for Nepal and Bangladesh doing so much better than India? Why hasn't democracy in India forced the government to be more responsive on health for the masses? And finally, is GDP or even per capita GDP truly a measure of well-being?

Chart 1 also has data for life expectancy and neonatal mortality rates for the 15 countries. Once again, Vietnam emerges at the top in life expectancy. India ranks a poor ninth. India ranks last, along with Ghana, in neonatal mortality among the 15 countries. As far as India is concerned, the data seems to suggest something is very wrong with its priorities—surely saving children's lives should be of prime importance in any society?

We come now to Chart 2. China is now much more advanced than India—in 2015, its per capita income, in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms and in constant 2011 international dollars, was \$13,572.20, compared to India's \$5,733.50. It may be argued therefore that China will have far better healthcare access indicators than India, because she is much richer. That is true and China's score on the healthcare index in 2015 is 74.2, far ahead of India's 44.8.

**Chart 2**  
**CHINA AND INDIA**

China in 1995, with half India's 2015 per capita income, does better than India in 2015 on health indicators.

	1995 China	2015 India
GDP per capita (PPP 2011 international \$)	2,564.1	5,733.5
Life expectancy (in years)	70	68
Neonatal mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	27	28
Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	48	48
Maternal mortality ratio (per 1,000 live births)	72	174
Healthcare index score	53.7	44.8

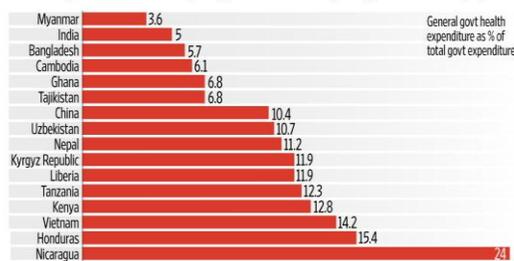
Source: World Bank indicators, Lancet

But what if we take the indicators for China 20 years ago, as long back as 1995? At that time, China's per capita income (in PPP terms in 2011 constant international dollars) was \$2,564.10, less than half India's per capita income today. But even then, China's score on the healthcare index was 53.7, well above India's current score. Chart 2 compares China's health data in 1995 with India's 2015 data. It shows that in life expectancy, neonatal mortality and maternal mortality, the China of 1995 was ahead of the India of 2015. Does a communist dictatorship care more for its people's health than a democracy? Comparing China with India, it certainly looks like it. Or is India merely an electoral democracy, without the masses having any real say on issues that are of vital importance to them?

Chart 3 lists government expenditure on health as a percentage of total government expenditure for the 15 countries and China. Again, India puts up a poor show, coming second from the bottom. The chart clearly brings out the fact that healthcare ranks rather low in the Indian government's list of priorities, at least compared to the importance given to it by other countries. Compared to India's 5%, China spends 10.4% of its government budget on health. Vietnam spends 14.2% and Nicaragua a huge 24%. This chart brings out one big reason for India's poor showing in the healthcare index.

**Chart 3**  
**SECOND LAST IN GOVT EXPENDITURE ON HEALTH**

The Indian government is extremely stingy when it comes to spending on health for its people.



Source: World Health Organization, World Health Statistics, 2017

Surely, now that our GDP is growing so fast and we have become a middle-income country, the government can afford to spend more on healthcare for its own people.

*Manas Chakravarty looks at trends and issues in the financial markets. Respond to this column at manas.c@livemint.com*

<http://www.dnaindia.com/health/report-healthcare-shame-india-ranked-154th-out-of-195-countries-ranked-by-lancet-medical-journal-2444312>

[http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/YrcGbLpfbqrWH55xAzehUM/Why-India-ranks-below-Liberia-in-global-healthcare-rankings.html?google\\_editors\\_picks=true](http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/YrcGbLpfbqrWH55xAzehUM/Why-India-ranks-below-Liberia-in-global-healthcare-rankings.html?google_editors_picks=true)

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