

Occasional News Wrap - #18/January - March, 2025



From Budget to Bottled Water: A Deep Dive into India's Health Priorities

01 January –31 March, 2025

In this period of ONW, the story of India's health sector unfolds through a strong policy push, tighter regulations, public health campaigns, and growing innovation.

The quarter began with key judicial and regulatory clarifications. The Supreme Court ruled that only the Central Government has the authority to ban medicines, bringing clarity to enforcement roles. Simultaneously, FSSAI revised its labeling compliance guidelines, granting businesses time to transition under the new norms. Two major developments highlighted both progress and challenge: NHM's achievement in adding over 12 lakh healthcare workers and reducing maternal and infant mortality, and the emergence of Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV), which exposed the fragile state of rural health infrastructure in managing respiratory illnesses.

Meanwhile, nutrition and food labeling drew renewed attention. A proposed Front-of-Package Labeling (FoPL) system aimed to guide healthier consumption, though opinions remain divided. An op-ed also emphasized the urgency of integrating comprehensive health education into school curricula to foster a healthier, more aware generation. The Union Budget brought a major boost to healthcare with significant allocations for cancer care centers and medical education expansion. The Economic Survey called for a health tax on ultra-processed foods and stronger labeling and marketing restrictions to curb lifestyle diseases.

As the conversation shifted toward digital innovation, AI's growing role in diagnostics and treatment was recognized, along with concerns around data privacy and infrastructure. The Health Ministry launched a large-scale screening initiative for hypertension and diabetes, coupled with upskilling of 40,000 doctors. Innovation in emergency care was exemplified by the launch of a 10-minute ambulance service through tech integration.

At the community level, improved maternal and child health outcomes were reported in Maharashtra due to early antenatal care efforts. Further strengthening system readiness, the Health Ministry urged all states to increase their health budgets by 10% annually. Food safety remained a critical theme. FSSAI flagged a significant portion of paneer samples in Karnataka as non-compliant, and later classified bottled water as high-risk due to high levels of nanoplastics, prompting health and environmental concerns. As India braced for rising temperatures, the Health Ministry issued advisories to enhance preparedness against heat-related illnesses, urging states to improve infrastructure and raise awareness.

This eighteenth volume of Occasional News Wrap captures the evolving landscape of health sector developments in India, featuring key policy decisions, expert commentary, and regulatory interventions that shaped the discourse during January to March 2025.

S.N.	Article/Op-ed	Key Takeaway
1.	<p>FSSAI Announces Revised Guidelines for Labeling Compliance: Key Amendments and Implementation Timeline</p> <p><i>Food – Drink & Innovation</i></p> <p>January 10, 2025</p>	<p>FSSAI has announced revised guidelines for labelling compliance, with new regulations set to come into effect on July 01, providing a minimum grace period of 180 days from the date of notification. This timeline applies to all amendments related to labelling provisions.</p>
2.	<p>Drug Inspector Cannot Impose Bans on Drugs</p> <p><i>Farhat Nasim</i></p> <p><i>Medical Dialogue Daily</i></p> <p><i>Dose of Health and Medical News</i></p> <p>January 10, 2025</p>	<p>The Supreme Court of India has ruled that only the Central Government can regulate, prohibit, or restrict the sale of drugs. The judgment clarifies that drug inspectors and regulatory authorities cannot impose such bans or unilaterally declare a medicinal product as prohibited without a central notification.</p>
3.	<p>Medical Cost in India is Likely to Surge by 13.2% in 2025</p> <p><i>Medical Buyer</i></p> <p>January 15, 2025</p>	<p>Medical costs in India are expected to rise by 13.2 percent in 2025 due to increasing demand, rising pharmaceutical and technology costs, and a higher burden of chronic diseases like diabetes and cancer. Insurers may adjust premiums to manage this surge. There is also a growing focus on early detection and personalised care, including genetic testing for cancer risk in insurance coverage.</p>
4.	<p>WHO Launches US\$1.5bn Appeal to Tackle Global Health Crises</p> <p><i>United Nations</i></p> <p>January 16, 2025</p>	<p>The United Nations has launched a US\$4.3n appeal to provide humanitarian aid to 17 million people in Yemen during 2025. This initiative aims to address the ongoing crisis, which has left over 21 million Yemenis in need of assistance. The funds will support efforts to alleviate suffering and promote peace in the region.</p>
5.	<p>NHM Bolsters India's Healthcare System: Over 12 lakh New Workers Added between 2021-2024</p> <p><i>DD News</i></p> <p>January 23, 2025</p>	<p>Between FY 2021-24, the National Health Mission (NHM) added over 12 lakh healthcare workers, including a major rise in Community Health Officers to 1.38 lakh. It supported over 220 crore COVID-19 vaccinations and contributed to significant health improvements — MMR reduced by 83 percent, U5MR by 75 percent, and TB incidence dropped from 237 to 195 per lakh population.</p>

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6.	<p>HMPV Cases & Challenges for Indian Healthcare Systems</p> <p><i>Sunil Rajpal</i></p> <p><i>BW HealthCare World</i></p> <p><i>January 23, 2025</i></p>	<p>Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) cases have emerged in India, mainly affecting infants. While generally mild, HMPV can cause severe illness in vulnerable groups. India's limited rural healthcare infrastructure and lack of routine surveillance for HMPV pose challenges. Experts urge improved diagnostics, awareness, and integration of HMPV into disease monitoring systems.</p>
7.	<p>Bringing Nutrition Info to Front of Package</p> <p><i>The Hindu</i></p> <p><i>January 26, 2025</i></p>	<p>India is considering implementing Front-of-Package Labels (FoPL) to address rising obesity and non-communicable diseases by providing clear nutritional information on food packaging. This initiative aims to help consumers make healthier dietary choices. However, debates persist over the design and effectiveness of such labels in influencing consumer behaviour.</p>
8.	<p>Budget 2025: Prioritise Health Education for a Stronger India</p> <p><i>Rahul Mehra</i></p> <p><i>The Pioneer</i></p> <p><i>January 29, 2025</i></p>	<p>In his article "<u>Budget 2025: Prioritise Health Education for a Stronger India.</u>" Rahul Mehra emphasises the critical need for integrating comprehensive health education into India's school curricula. With over 40 percent of the population under 25, he argues that educating youth on physical and mental health is essential for the nation's future. By doing so, India can foster a healthier, more productive population, aligning with the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047</p>
9.	<p>Government Making Policy Reforms to Ensure Affordable and Accessible Healthcare</p> <p><i>Prathiba Raju</i></p> <p><i>Economic Times</i></p> <p><i>January 31, 2025</i></p>	<p><u>President Droupadi Murmu</u>, addressing the Budget session, highlighted the government's commitment to multi-dimensional and inclusive development, emphasising efforts to make healthcare more affordable and accessible. Key initiatives include the establishment of 1.75 lakh Ayushman Arogya Mandirs, exemption of certain cancer drugs from customs duty, plans to add 75,000 new seats in medical colleges over five years, and the development of bulk drug and medical device parks to boost domestic manufacturing.</p>

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10.	<p>Economic Survey 2024-25: Levy higher Tax Rate for Ultra-Processed Foods</p> <p><i>Bindu Shajan Perappadan</i> <i>The Hindu</i> <i>February 01, 2025</i></p>	<p>The Economic Survey 2025 recommends imposing a 'health tax' on ultra-processed foods (UPFs) to mitigate their adverse health effects. It suggests implementing stricter Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) labelling norms, defining clear nutrient thresholds for sugar, salt, and saturated fats, and enforcing stringent marketing restrictions, particularly for products targeting children under 18. The survey also advocates for awareness campaigns in schools and colleges to educate the public on the risks associated with UPFs.</p>
11.	<p>Budget 2025 Push to Healthcare: Expanding Cancer Centres, Strengthening Medical</p> <p><i>Economics Times</i> <i>February 01, 2025</i></p>	<p>The Union Budget 2025-26 has allocated ₹98,311 crore to the healthcare sector, marking a significant push for growth. Key initiatives include the establishment of 200 daycare cancer centres in district hospitals, aiming to enhance oncology care and reduce the burden on tertiary institutions. Additionally, the budget proposes adding 10,000 medical education seats to address the shortage of skilled healthcare professionals.</p>
12.	<p>How AI Is Impacting India's Healthcare Industry</p> <p><i>Karan Kashyap</i> <i>Forbes</i> <i>February 09, 2025</i></p>	<p>AI is transforming India's healthcare by enhancing diagnostics, enabling personalised treatments, and improving efficiency. It helps in early disease detection and predictive care, but challenges like data privacy, infrastructure gaps, and training needs must be addressed for its effective adoption.</p>
13.	<p>How Will the National Ayush Mission Shape the Future of Healthcare in India?</p> <p><i>India Brand Equity Foundation</i> <i>February 10, 2025</i></p>	<p>The National AYUSH Mission (NAM) aims to integrate traditional Indian medicine systems — Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy — into the mainstream healthcare framework. By enhancing infrastructure, promoting research, and ensuring quality control, NAM seeks to provide holistic and affordable healthcare options, particularly in rural areas. This initiative is expected to diversify treatment choices, improve patient outcomes, and contribute to the overall strengthening of India's healthcare system.</p>

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14.	<p>Government to Screen and Provide Standard Care to 75 Million People with Hypertension and Diabetes by 2025</p> <p><i>The Print</i></p> <p><i>February 16, 2025</i></p>	<p>The Health Ministry launched an initiative to screen and provide standard care to 75 million individuals with hypertension and diabetes by 2025, aiming to expand non-communicable disease management at the primary healthcare level. It includes training 40,000 primary healthcare doctors via the Shashakt Portal and updating guidelines under the NP-NCD programme to strengthen non-communicable disease care at the community level.</p>
15.	<p>The Health Revolution India is being Waiting for</p> <p><i>eHealth Network</i></p> <p><i>February 18, 2025</i></p>	<p>Blinkit has launched a Basic Life Support (BLS) ambulance service with a 10-minute response time in India, earning praise for its efficiency and integration of technology in healthcare. Dr. Deepak Agarwal, Professor of Neurosurgery at AIIMS, highlighted the service's professionalism and quality of care, noting it as the healthcare revolution India has been awaiting. This initiative exemplifies how technology can significantly enhance emergency medical services in the country.</p>
16.	<p>Technology, Collaboration, And Regulation Key to India's Healthcare Transformation</p> <p><i>Siddharth Kumar Singh</i></p> <p><i>The Hindu</i></p> <p><i>February 27, 2025</i></p>	<p>At the BioAsia 2025 conference, healthcare experts emphasised the need for India to revise its clinical trial regulations to increase its global market share, which stands at eight percent compared to China's 29 percent. They highlighted the importance of accelerating regulatory processes and patient recruitment to attract more sponsors. The Drugs Controller General of India, Rajeev Raghuvanshi, noted ongoing efforts to streamline procedures, with approximately 160 trials approved in the past three years. Additionally, experts suggested adopting practices from countries like the US and UK, such as allowing advertisements for ongoing studies to raise patient awareness, particularly for rare diseases.</p>

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17.	<p>860-Bed Hospital to Enhance Healthcare Access in N Chennai</p> <p><i>The Times of India</i></p> <p>February 28, 2025</p>	<p>The Periyar Government Hospital in Kolathur, Chennai, has been upgraded to an 860-bed facility to enhance healthcare access for residents of North Chennai and nearby areas. Inaugurated by Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, the six-story hospital includes 10 operating theatres, 200 intensive and post-operative care beds, and 20 emergency beds. It offers services across 10 super specialties and 18 specialties, such as cardiology, neurology, and paediatrics. Built at a cost of ₹211 crore, with an additional ₹84.17 crore allocated for equipment, the hospital is staffed by 121 doctors and 221 nurses. It will also serve as a training centre for medical students from Madras Medical College.</p>
18.	<p>Prioritising Women, Newborn and Child Health in Maharashtra</p> <p><i>WHO News</i></p> <p>March 04, 2025</p>	<p>In Maharashtra's Surgana block, efforts to promote early antenatal care (ANC) have led to 99 percent of pregnant women registering in their first trimester by 2024, resulting in improved maternal and child health outcomes. Maternal mortality declined from 138 to 111 per 100,000 live births, and infant mortality decreased from 12 to 6 per 1,000 live births between 2021 and 2024.</p>
19.	<p>Health Ministry Urges States to Boost Health Budgets by 10% Annually</p> <p><i>Down to Earth</i></p> <p>March 12, 2025</p>	<p>On March 11, 2025, the Health Ministry urged states to increase their health budgets by 10 percent annually to enhance healthcare services. This recommendation aims to address healthcare challenges and improve public health infrastructure.</p>
20.	<p>163 Paneer Samples Tested by FSSAI in Karnataka</p> <p><i>The Hindu</i></p> <p>March 18, 2025</p>	<p>The FSSAI tested 163 paneer samples in Karnataka, revealing that 18 were non-compliant with safety standards. The violations included issues such as mislabelling and the presence of harmful substances. Authorities have initiated actions against the violators to ensure consumer safety and maintain food quality standards.</p>

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21.	<p>Is Bottled Water a Healthy Choice?</p> <p><i>Aakanksha Mahendra Ahire</i></p> <p><i>The Times of India</i></p> <p><i>March 23, 2025</i></p>	<p>In December 2024, the FSSAI classified packaged drinking and mineral water as 'High-Risk Food,' requiring annual inspections and third-party audits to enhance quality control. Additionally, a 2024 study revealed that bottled water contains significantly more nano plastics than previously estimated, averaging 240,000 plastic particles per litre. Experts advise using glass or stainless steel containers for drinking water to reduce exposure to these contaminants.</p>
22.	<p>Health Ministry Urges States to Strengthen Action Plans Against Heat-Related Illnesses</p> <p><i>Financial Express</i></p> <p><i>March 27, 2025</i></p>	<p>The Health Ministry has urged states and union territories to implement heat-health action plans in response to India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecasts predicting above-normal temperatures for March 2025. Key measures include ensuring power supply, installing cooling systems, and raising public awareness to prevent heat-related illnesses.</p>