

Getting public health right

What is the issue?

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Amidst rise in various diseases and health concerns, it is high time that India addresses the issue of understanding "public health" appropriately.

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What is the misconception with public health?

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 - "Disease-care" is something which includes the different types of biomedical interventions to restore ill-health.
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 - This, in popular parlance, is called the "**healthcare**" which addresses the **visible infrastructure** of clinics and hospitals and is labour-intensive.
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 - On the other hand, "**public health**" is all about **invisible infrastructure**, working to mitigate social and environmental determinants of diseases.
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 - However, the term 'public health' has long been misappropriated to mean healthcare in the public sector.
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 - This confines the focus to only state-run hospitals.

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What impact does this create?

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 - The lack of understanding has hampered the efforts to have a separate public health department.
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 - India has established a few community-level interventions to prevent certain diseases.

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- This includes stand-alone vertical projects against tuberculosis (TB), malaria, leprosy, filariasis, AIDS, etc.
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- However all of these remain silos in the absence of an integrated public health infrastructure.
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- This is the reason why most of these individual verticals has not delivered its potential in disease prevention.
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- Ex: The rampant drug resistance in TB is largely man-made as a result of lack of application of public health expertise in TB control measures.
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- Various vaccinations programmes are undertaken by the government.
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- But, with the lack of public health infrastructure, monitoring the benefits and controlling the diseases are not happening.
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What should be done?

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- Establishing a specialised **public health machinery** to address the social and environmental causes and prevent diseases before hand is essential.
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- Public health must be managed by professionals trained in public health and empowered to work for the health security of all people.
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- Medical students should be made aware of not only disease diagnosis, treatment and individual preventive medicine, but also of environmental and community risk factors in terms of public health.
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- A functional public health infrastructure can go a long way in preventing the possibly preventable communicable diseases.
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Source: Livemint

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