

₹400 crore for 100 polyclinics offering free treatment

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Mumbai: The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) allocated ₹400 crore to set up 100 polyclinics and diagnostic centres which will be called 'Hinduhridayasamrat Balasaheb Thackeray Health Centre' across all 24 administrative wards in the city. This will be augmented with another 100 in a subsequent phase.

The centres which will be equipped with waiting rooms, doctors, medical stores, nursing staff rooms and consultation rooms for patients and will offer 139 types of tests, including diagnostic and radiology tests like X-rays, CT scans, and mammography, free of cost. These centres will also facilitate specialist consultations through telemedicine from doctors at the major civic hospitals such as KEM, Sion and Nair.

Besides this, the BMC announced setting up of 200 Shiv Yog Kendras, or yoga training centres where experts will help promote mental and physical well-being.

The civic body has allocated 15% of its total budget to healthcare while recording a nearly 47% jump in allocation compared to the previous financial year. From ₹4,728 crore in 2021-2022, the estimated health budget was increased to ₹6,933 crores for 2022-2023.

Terming the health budget "game changing", municipal commissioner Iqbal Singh Chahal on Thursday said: As most of the pathological and radiological tests are expensive, many citizens are unable to afford them easily, which is why we are calling this move a game-

changer as it will not make medical treatment more accessible but also will ease the load on peripheral hospitals.”

Currently, BMC runs 187 medical dispensaries and 27 maternity centres offering primary treatment in Mumbai. Chahal said that in the first year, 100 of these centres will be upgraded and a fund of ₹400 crore (₹4 crore per centre) have been earmarked. The BMC will recruit 800 resident doctors and tie up with 56 pathological laboratories to run these clinics, Chahal said.

“At present, our dispensaries do not have any diagnostic facilities. We plan to refurbish these dispensaries into newer, equipped centres. In some places, where the space does not permit us to refurbish, we will tie up with the nearest diagnostic centres for testing,” said additional municipal commissioner Suresh Kakani.

“I have also studied the Delhi government’s Mohalla Clinic model. However BMC’s polyclinics will be more advanced than Delhi model. The Mohalla clinics only provide primary health treatment while we will be providing pathological and radiological facilities along with post treatment consultation,” Chahal said.

The centres will be set up at the administrative ward level to ensure citizens get treated at their neighbourhood itself and they don’t have to visit the hospital for trivial issues.

Health experts said that the jump is necessary given the burden that the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has placed on healthcare infrastructure, but the health budget allocation may still fall short for a megapolis like Mumbai.

To be sure, the allocations can be increased by the civic body during the course of the financial year.

Of the total health budget estimate of ₹6,933 crore, about ₹4,273 crore is for revenue expenditure whereas ₹2,660 crore is for capital expenditure. Revenue expenditure consists of spending on manpower, salaries, transportation and other day-to-day expenses, while capital expenditure includes spending on infrastructure, construction work, and procuring equipment, among other things. Last year, the BMC had allotted ₹1,102 crore in the health budget for capital expenditure, and this year sees almost 150 % increase in capital budget outlay of the health department.

“If we calculate the per capita, it comes up to around ₹2000. The city should ideally allocate at least double that sum. For instance, Delhi’s per capita health budget is around ₹4,000 to ₹4,500,” said Ravi Duggal, a public health researcher and activist.

A large chunk of the budget will go into expanding and redeveloping hospitals such as Bhagwati Hospital in Borivli, MT Agarwal in Mulund, Bhabha hospital in Bandra, Shatabdi Hospital in Govandi as well as the construction of a cancer hospital for proton therapy at KEM Hospital.

The outlay will also include digitisation of birth and death registration data.

“This will help in understanding the trends on what ails Mumbai,” said Milind Mhaske, director of nonprofit Praja Foundation.

In 2021-2022, the budget was revised to ₹6,624 and a large amount was spent on fighting the pandemic including building and maintaining jumbo Covid facilities and upgrading

laboratories. Experts said that the 2022-2023 budget is also likely to be revised given the pandemic is not yet over.

To recover Covid-19 related expenditure, BMC has claimed a reimbursement of ₹2,764 crores Covid-19 expenditure to the state government.

Soumitra Ghosh, associate professor at the Centre for Health Policy, Planning and Management at Tata Institute of Social Sciences said that the benefits of robust primary healthcare go a long way in improving economic as well as health parameters. “Yet, if we look at the overall budget, more than 75% is allocated to secondary and tertiary care facilities. I believe that it should be the other way round,” he said.

“The focus on primary healthcare is a great step, but what about the manpower? There is a huge gap in terms of manpower in the city’s public health facilities. The civic authorities should focus on plugging this gap, besides creating new infrastructure,” Mhaske said.

As many as 45% of posts in the public health department were vacant, according to a public health manifesto released by the nonprofits Praja Foundation and Mumbai First in December 2021. These included posts of medical as well as the paramedical staff.

The 200 Shiv Yog Kendras will be set up inside BMC schools and community halls and will offer online classes.

“If more than 30 members from housing societies can suggest availability of space then these centres could be started there as well. The BMC will be providing all the necessary appliances like TV sets so that the participants can take part in the programme through online classes,” said Chahal.

Chahal said that a dedicated panel of experts will be appointed to monitor these centres for which a fund of ₹30 crore has been allocated. The BMC will also set up a 36,000 Square feet at Nagpada, which with a view to provide medical facility and treatment for specially abled children.

Link: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/mumbai-news/400-crore-for-100-polyclinics-offering-free-treatment-101643915736245.html>