

Mumbai needs 659 dispensaries, reveals NGO report

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By [HT Correspondent](#)

Mumbai Mumbai has a severe shortage of public dispensaries with the city needing at least 659 to fulfil the paucity.

A report released by NGO Praja Foundation revealed that the worst hit is western suburbs which needs at least 315 public dispensaries. The report said the city, which has 27% slum population, needs 133 more dispensaries while eastern suburbs with 51% slum population needs 211 more dispensaries.

According to the norms of the Urban Design Plan Formulation and Implementation (UDPFI) by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, one public dispensary should cater to a population of 15,000 people.

“Primary healthcare provides a decentralised approach which acts as the first level of public healthcare services and in turn can reduce pressure on government hospitals,” said Milind Mhaske, CEO Praja Foundation. “Shortage of public dispensaries has led to people belonging to lower socio-economic classes accessing private healthcare or other corporation-run tertiary care hospitals.”

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“Absence of a robust primary health service is one of the many reasons why people are forced to access private healthcare services resulting in increase in Out-Of-Pocket (OOP) cost, which further leads to poverty,” said Mhaske.

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) presently has 187 dispensaries, out of which only 12 are accessible for 14 hours, one of them is accessible for 11 hours, while 174 dispensaries are open for only for five to seven hours a day. According to the Praja report, in 2020, 115 dispensaries were open for 14 hours and in 2021, it reduced to only 12. It also highlighted the increasing vacancies at the dispensaries. As of December 2021, the report said there is a vacancy of 21% in medical personnel and 35% in paramedical staff in the BMC dispensaries.

“Wards like D, G/S and K/E ward dispensaries have a 50%, 40% and 38% vacancy in medical staff. In the pandemic, we have seen how BMC reacted on a war footing and managed to procure manpower via contract and on a private partnership basis. BMC has always focused on building secondary and tertiary care health infrastructure. We need to strengthen our dispensaries, and available resources need to be optimally utilised,” said Mhaske.

Dr Mangesh Pednekar, Director, Healis Institute of Public Health, said that BMC, which has a rich experience in managing Covid, should replicate strategies in overall strengthening of primary healthcare in the city. “BMC had demonstrated effective management strategies to control the pandemic by introducing decentralised Covid war rooms in all 24 wards, with real-time ward-wise data management. This was carried out through public private partnerships and mobilising civil societies and NGO infrastructure. Similar strategies need to be used to strengthen overall primary healthcare infrastructure and maintain real time mortality and morbidity data in Mumbai.”

Ravi Duggal, a public health researcher and activist, said primary health care is critical and because of its absence, there is overcrowding in tertiary care centres. “We have a shortage of dispensaries. We also need to have dispensaries and urban health

centres under one roof. Absence of a good primary health care system has been forcing people to go for private health services,” he said.

While reacting to the Praja report, Dr Mangal Gomare, executive health officer, BMC said that there is a BMC budget provision of ₹250 crore for the capital expenditure and ₹150 crore for the revenue expenditure on this project that aims to boost the city’s healthcare at the primary level. The BMC plans to start 13 of these clinics on a pilot project basis which will be increased to 70 clinics.

“It will address the health concerns of the urban population more effectively and reduce the healthcare load on our hospitals. Seeking specialist opinions in the private sector is expensive for patients and at the same time availability of specialists in public sector facilities is a challenge. Hence, to have a specialist available for all patients at public health facilities to provide decentralised patient management is the need of the hour. Hence, BMC wishes to engage with specialists to provide their consultation in HBT polyclinics,” she said.

Meanwhile, the report also showed that the total diabetes cases increased by 37% from 26,688 in 2012 to 36,616 in 2021. Total hypertension cases increased by 5% from 28,595 in 2012 to 30,011 in 2021.

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