

# India's Health Research & Development: A Roadmap for Resilience

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India's health system has traditionally been evaluated in terms of inclusion, providing access to healthcare for the marginalized through programs like Ayushman Bharat. Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the vulnerabilities in Research and Development (R&D), necessitating a more robust, resilient health system. This was a critical point of call to action, signalling the transition toward investment in the health research future.

In the last few years, this change has gathered pace. The Department of Health Research has experienced a consistent budget rise, resulting in a remarkable 111% increase in funding for the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), from Rs. 14,791.7 million for the year 2019-20 to Rs. 31,255 million for the year 2025-26. ICMR has been at the forefront of driving frontier research and combating lethal diseases. Its efforts, including the creation of diagnostic networks like the Viral Research and Diagnostic Laboratories (VRDL), have transformed outbreak detection and response.

These strategic investments in health R&D are part of a larger movement in Global South countries, which are focusing on indigenous research to combat endemic diseases and minimize reliance on foreign sources. A classic instance of such localized R&D is the partnership between African governments and the Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative (DNDi) to create region-specific treatments for regional health issues. Such initiatives reflect the capabilities of country-driven innovation in overcoming health emergencies and driving medical research.

The Union Budget 2025-26 has also strengthened India's resolve towards health R&D. With a focus on joint research efforts among academia, international health agencies, and industry, the government seeks to decrease dependence on imports, encourage domestic medical technology, and make India the world's hub of health innovation. Programs such as the "First in World Challenge" are expected to stimulate research innovation on non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer.

Greater investment in R&D is not a policy choice; it is a game-changing initiative that provides a platform for a healthier, more resilient India. Prioritizing health research sends a strong signal that R&D is not an expense but a gateway to national development and world health improvement.

