



May 20, 2020

To,

Dear Dr. Vinod K. Paul
Empowered Group- Medical Emergency Management Plan
Ministry of Home Affairs, North Block,
New Delhi- 110001

Subject: Recommendations for strengthening of the Medical Emergency Management Plan from Oxfam India

This is with reference to the current health emergency in form of the COVID19 pandemic which has challenged even the best healthcare systems in the world. This is a once in a lifetime emergency which calls for measures to suppress the disease, tackle devastating social and economic dimensions of the crisis and ensure recovery. Despite the limitations, India's COVID health response has been recognised across the globe. However, the disease curve is still rising calling for further efforts to tackle disease spread to minimise the damage caused by the Pandemic.




Oxfam India is on the ground responding with cooked meals, dry food ration, and safety kits including Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in nearly 14 states. We have reached out to 4.5 million people through innovative techniques on mass awareness generation on COVID-19 by the use of mobile vans and mikes (supplying information through microphone). Based on our experience of working on health in India and past emergencies, we would like to submit some recommendations to strengthen India's health response and win this battle against the Corona virus:

- 1. Enhance transparency by providing disaggregated data at block level on Covid-19 cases**, more specifically in terms of age and gender to ensure preparedness of the health system and keep the public informed. This will help professionals to identify communities and areas at most risk and guide health officials to refine response strategies like health infrastructure improvements, provision of testing kits, funding allocation, nutritional provisions and other preventive measures for that particular group and location.
- 2. Healthcare is a fundamental human right and government has responsibility to protect, promote and fulfil their obligation pertaining to the right to health** and provide it without discrimination. Diseases beyond COVID are claiming more lives than the pandemic itself. More than 100,000 children are estimated to have died within the first month of life; 6,000 mothers in the maternity period and more than 100,000 due to diarrhoea from 30th January to 3rd May 2020¹. **Therefore, the government should ensure continued availability of healthcare services by private health providers** (including dialysis, treatment for cancer, tuberculosis, epilepsy, ante and postnatal care, maternity and safe abortion services, care of chronic ailments, and operation of regular OPDs). **Ensure private health facilities are in-line with the Patients' Rights Charter of Union Health Ministry** and do not resort to unethical practices like denying treatment, overcharging, etc., in this time of health emergency.

¹ <https://scroll.in/article/962147/stronger-health-system-could-have-averted-500000-non-covid-deaths-in-india-in-early-lockdown-period>

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Grievance redressal mechanism should be strengthened to help patients report such incidents in private health facilities.

3. **Ramp-up ambulance facilities to enable patients' travel** to the dedicated COVID Hospitals without patients having to bear financial burden. It is necessary to have dedicated ambulance services for transportation of COVID patients to minimise the risk of transmission, more specifically in rural and affected areas. According to the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), 6,226 ambulances are available with the government to cater to the country's rural areas. This is half the required number of ambulances. Therefore, **augmenting the capacities for patient transport is needed, more specifically around red zones and containment areas** where the demand for ambulance services may be higher. **The government should adopt a need-based inclusion plan of private ambulance facilities** according to the number of COVID cases reported in an area. Moreover, these ambulances should be accessible to COVID patients without incurring any cost.
4. **Ensure availability of essential medicines along with its equitable and affordable access to all.** The government needs to make provisions to safeguard the supply chain for drugs from National Essential Medicine List. This is aimed to ensure availability of key medicines to every part of the country, more specifically in remote areas and those in red and containment zones. Ensure medicines are available at affordable prices without price-surges via rigorous surveillance on black-marketing and hoarding. Additionally, the government should ensure availability of medicines at Government run Primary Health facilities. **Provisions should be made for home delivery of medicines for chronic patients via frontline health-workers, specifically in red zones and containment areas.** Co-ordinate with states for a rigorous grievance redress mechanism to act on reports of unavailability of medicines and instances of price surge.

We hope our recommendations would be useful in tackling and minimising the effect COVID in the country. It would be an honour to collaborate with the committee and provide our technical expertise or any other support that might be needed in this time of crisis. We stand with you in your effort to strengthen the public health system amidst this coronavirus pandemic.




Looking forward to hearing from you

Regards,

Amitabh Behar
Chief Executive Officer

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