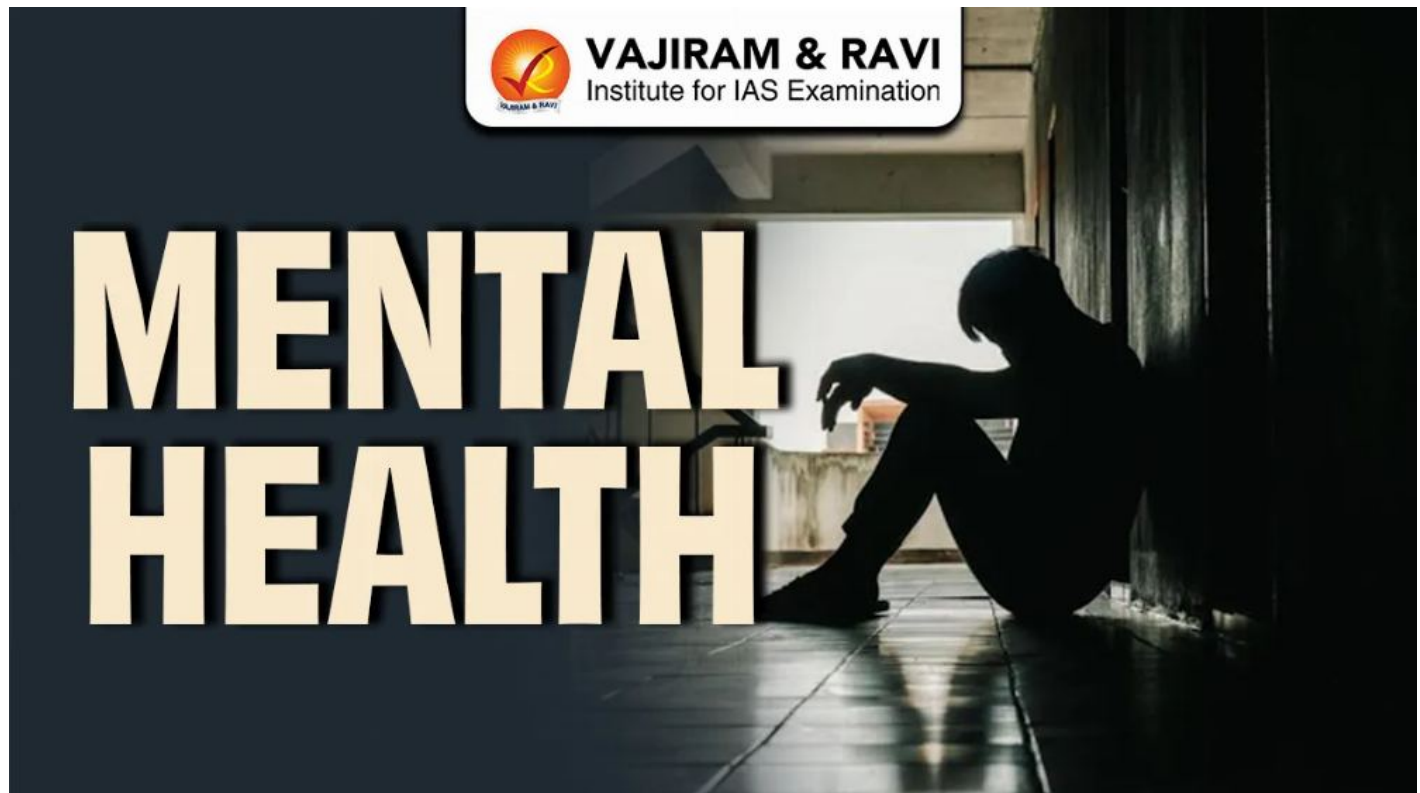


India's Strategy to Tackle the Mental Health Burden: Infrastructure, Gaps and Way Forward

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Mental Health Latest News

- The Economic Survey recently flagged a worrying rise in **digital addiction** and **screen-related mental health issues**, especially among children and adolescents.
- Responding to these concerns, the February 1 Union Budget announced steps to strengthen India's mental health infrastructure.
- Key measures include the proposal to set up a second National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) in north India, alongside plans to upgrade premier mental health institutions in Ranchi and Tezpur.
- These steps aim to improve regional access, reduce pressure on existing facilities, and expand specialised mental healthcare services across the country.

India's Mental Health Burden: Scale and Severity

- Experts warn that India is facing a serious mental health crisis.

- The country accounts for nearly one-third of global cases of suicide, depression, and addiction, making mental health a major public health challenge.

High Suicide Burden Among Youth

- Data from the National Crime Records Bureau and the Sample Registration System under the Ministry of Home Affairs show that:
 - Suicide is among the leading causes of death for Indians aged 15–29 years.
 - Young people are particularly vulnerable due to academic pressure, unemployment, social stress, and digital addiction

Economic Cost of Mental Illness

- According to the World Health Organization (WHO):
 - India is expected to lose \$1.03 trillion between 2012 and 2030 due to mental health conditions.
 - Losses stem from reduced productivity, healthcare costs, and premature mortality.

Large Treatment Gap

- A major concern is the treatment gap: 70%–92% of people with mental disorders do not receive proper care.
- Key reasons include: Lack of awareness; Social stigma; Severe shortage of trained mental health professionals.

Shortage of Mental Health Professionals

- As per the Indian Journal of Psychiatry:
 - India has 0.75 psychiatrists per 1,00,000 people
 - The WHO recommends at least 3 psychiatrists per 1,00,000
- This gap severely limits access to diagnosis, counselling, and treatment.

Low Budgetary Priority

- Although overall health spending has increased since FY2014–15, mental health has received: Only about 1% of the total health budget.
- Limited funding has constrained infrastructure, manpower, and outreach services

Mental Health Infrastructure in India: Expanding Access Beyond Hospitals

- To meet the rising demand for mental health services, the government has integrated mental healthcare into primary healthcare under Ayushman Bharat.
- Mental health services are now part of the Comprehensive Primary Health Care package delivered through Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (Health and Wellness Centres).

- Over 1.73 lakh sub-health centres and primary health centres have been upgraded into Ayushman Arogya Mandirs
- These centres provide basic mental health screening, counselling, and referrals, reducing dependence on specialised hospitals

Strengthening Specialist Capacity

- To address the shortage of trained professionals, the government has expanded education and training infrastructure:
 - Over 20 Centres of Excellence sanctioned for postgraduate training in mental health
 - 47 postgraduate departments in mental health established nationwide
- These initiatives aim to increase the availability of psychiatrists, psychologists, and mental health specialists, especially in underserved regions.

Tele-Mental Health Support: Tele MANAS

- India has complemented physical infrastructure with digital outreach through Tele MANAS (Tele Mental Health Assistance and Networking Across States):
 - 24×7 free mental health support via helplines 14416 or 1-800-891-4416
 - Launched on October 10, 2022
 - 53 operational cells across 36 States and Union Territories
 - Backed by 23 specialised mentoring institutes
- Tele MANAS bridges access gaps, especially for people in remote areas or those hesitant to seek in-person care.

Where Does India Fall Short on Mental Health Funding

- India's mental health budget has increased from ₹683 crore in 2020–21 to about ₹1,898 crore in 2024–25.
- However, experts argue that this rise masks a deeper **problem of chronic underinvestment**.
- The allocation remains below 2% of the total health budget, which itself is only around 2% of India's GDP—far short of what the scale of the mental health burden demands.

Mismatch Between Spending and Need

- The underinvestment becomes stark when weighed against:
 - India's high suicide and depression burden
 - Massive treatment gaps
 - Economic losses due to untreated mental illness
- Despite these realities, mental health continues to receive low fiscal priority.

Overemphasis on Tertiary Institutions

- A major concern is where the money goes. A significant portion of allocations continues to be directed toward tertiary institutions such as NIMHANS and newly established centres of excellence.

- While important, experts argue that:
 - Tertiary institutions alone cannot mainstream mental healthcare in a country of India's size
 - They serve a limited population and are often concentrated in urban areas
- They stress the need for targeted funding for **grassroots mental health programmes**, including:
 - Community-based services
 - Early intervention models
 - Preventive and promotive mental healthcare
- Such approaches are more effective in reaching underserved populations and reducing long-term disease burden.

Utilisation Gap Compounds the Problem

- Beyond low allocations, there is also a utilisation issue:
 - Funds earmarked for mental health are not fully utilised at the national level
 - Administrative bottlenecks and lack of local capacity hinder effective spending
 - Health experts argue that better utilisation requires decentralised planning and community-led models, not just increased funding.

The Way Ahead: Shifting to Preventive and Community-Based Mental Healthcare

- India urgently needs affordable access, continuity of care, and timely treatment to prevent avoidable deaths and disability from mental illness.
- Experts highlight an over-reliance on specialist-led, tertiary care, severe shortages of trained professionals, and a 95% access gap.
- The government is pivoting to a whole-of-community approach, integrating mental well-being into schools and strengthening workplace policies to address stress and burnout—signalling a shift from curative to preventive, community-based care.

Source: TH

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/indias-strategy-to-tackle-the-mental-health-burden-infrastructure-gaps-and-way-forward/>
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