

## India: Health

India has a mixed public-private health care system. Although in principle free government health services are available to all citizens, in reality the public system does not have enough hospital beds and trained staff to serve the population. Many patients are thus forced to turn to private health care, enduring high out-of-pocket expenses, which account for nearly 70 percent of total health expenditures in the country. Many private hospitals, especially those located in cities, are equipped with modern technology and highly trained medical personnel. Government efforts to provide insurance to families living on incomes below the poverty line, begun in 2008, had reached about 57 percent of their target by 2016. In 2018 the government announced a National Health Protection Mission, promising to provide free health insurance to around 500 million people; critics have charged that the effort is poorly funded.

Still, improvements in medical care have raised the life expectancy to 69 years in 2017 from 58 years in 1990. The leading causes of death today are cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, overtaking infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis and malaria, which are the result of poor sanitation and contaminated drinking water and continue to cause hundreds of thousands of deaths every year. In 2016 there were 62,000 deaths from AIDS, down dramatically from recent years, but still the fourth highest in the world, after Nigeria, South Africa, and Mozambique. Infant mortality rates are falling but still quite high, at more than 39 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2017.

India has four major health-care philosophies, each having different historical origins. Three of them take a holistic approach to illness and see it as a result of underlying imbalances. The oldest, Ayurveda, relies on herbal remedies. *Sidda* developed in South India, and its diagnoses depend on careful reading of the pulse. *Unani* is of Islamic origins and also emphasizes holistic treatments. The fourth system is modern Western medicine, taught at several hundred medical colleges in India.

### Citation Information



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