

AIR Spotlight - Budget Expectations for Health, Education and Social Sectors

AIR Spotlight is an insightful program featured daily on the All India Radio Newsonair. In this program, many eminent panellists discuss issues of importance which can be quite helpful in [IAS exam](#) preparation. In this article, an interview discussing the “Budget Expectations for Health, Education and Social Sectors” is featured.

Participants:

1. Subhomoy Bhattacharya, Economic Analyst
2. Ruchika Chitravanshi, Journalist.

Context:

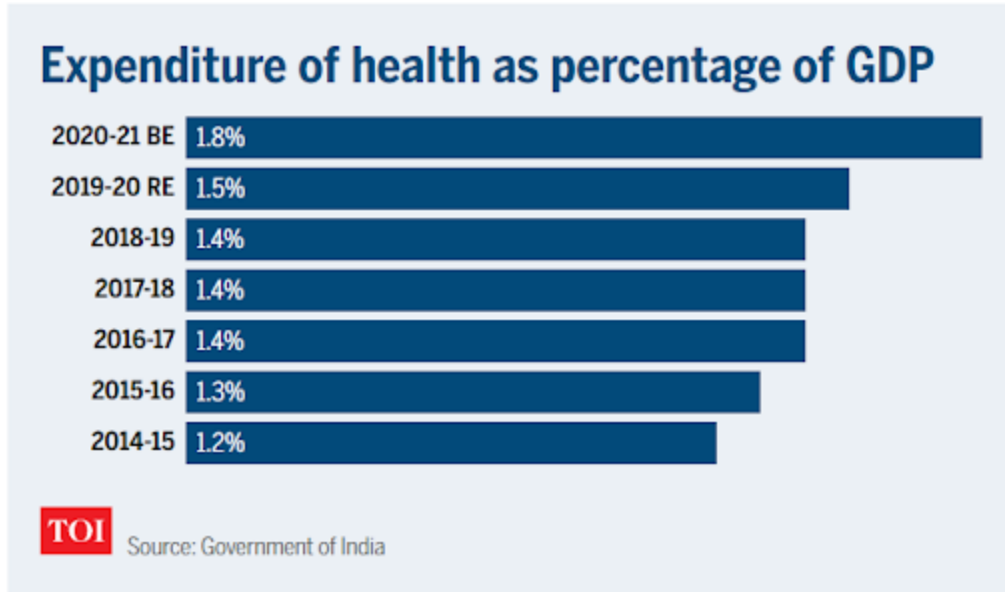
As the government is set to present the Union Budget on February 1, expectations have started to build up across the significant sectors such as health, education.

Social Sectors:

- India’s social sector in general, and health and education in particular, encounter significant regional, social and gender disparities, slow growth in public expenditures and problems in delivery systems.
- **Expectations:**
 - **Livelihood:** Adequate fund allocation for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme in the budget itself would help avoid mid-year disruptions due to exhaustion of funds.
 - **Tribal welfare:** Fund allocation for the Eklavya Model Residential School (EMRS) scheme should go beyond civil works. Dedicated multilingual teachers and incorporation of digital teaching pedagogy.
 - **Nutrition:** Another important issue in the social sector is that of undernutrition. The NFHS- 5 report shows that malnutrition has worsened in some other states. There is a need to raise allocations for ICDS and other nutrition programmes.

Health

- Our health infrastructure – at primary, secondary and tertiary levels was in bad shape even before the spread of Covid-19.
- The budget must allocate greater outlays for the health sector – both preventive and curative.
- **Problems of Health Sector:** Affordable healthcare, Lack of adequate healthcare infrastructure, demand-supply mismatches and shortages of basic supplies.



- **Issues in terms of Government Finance:**

- 1) Lack of Financial Resources: Slow resurgence of non-emergent care and increased costs associated with preparing for the pandemic
- 2) Upgradation of capacity: – Lack of medical staff and infrastructure, accessibility of infrastructure, Medical infrastructure, Capacity of health sector, Lack of capacity to absorb finance.

- **Expectations: –**

- **Allocating higher budget to the sector:** The sector is expecting somewhere between a 10 and 15 percent hike in this budget considering the size of the Indian population and the impact of the pandemic on the sector.
- **Reduction on the GST on healthcare products:** In order to make healthcare affordable to every Indian, one of the foremost expectations is to reduce the GST on healthcare products.
- **Easing the norms of FDI in the healthcare sector:** Easing the norms of raising funds and FDI will act as a tonic to the healthcare revolution.
- **Provisions for disaster preparedness:** The healthcare sector expects the government to allocate funds and make programs for further research and preparedness for any such future event.
- **Aggressive planning and investment in the National Digital Health Mission:** The sector expects that there will be further planning and aggressive investments in the mission in this budget too.
- **Separate Allocation for Behavioral change:** A separate allocation must be made for health communication for behavioral change that will nudge people to adopt healthy and sustainable consumption and behavior in the medium-to-long run.

Education:

- **Problems:**
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 - The impact of the pandemic on the education system has made us increasingly reliant on supplementary sources of education, primarily provided by private organizations.
 - Several aspects of the current education system need a fresh outlook especially education for school-age group children.
 - In the current state of the economy, the implementation of the National Educational Policy (NEP) is being seen as one of the main thrust of the current Budget.
 - Covid has widened the learning gap where both urban and rural poor got the worst hit.
- **Expectations:**
 - **Increased budget allotment:** Besides increasing the spending on basic education, the sector also expects the budget 2022 to focus on increased capital expenditure on the creation of infrastructure for practical skill development.
 - **Focus on edtech sector and digital infrastructure:** The 2022 budget is expected to have a higher focus on the edtech sector as a whole, with significant investments to enhance greater access to robust and improved digital infrastructure.
 - **Reduced GST Slab:** The GST for educational services is expected to be brought down to 5 percent from the existing 18%, to increase accessibility and feasibility for students from lower and middle-class families.
 - **Promoting the use of technology:** The education sector hopes that the government will provide support to the educational institution in the adoption of technology.
 - **Higher spending on research and development:** The country has seen a surge in new research, developments, and innovations. An increased focus on promoting R & D is another expectation of the sector from the upcoming budget.
 - **Systemize Access to Digital Education:** The government should focus on improving internet connectivity, improving e-learning infrastructure for students and addressing the digital divide.
 - **Mandate Vocational Education:** The mandate to provide vocational education under the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)/Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan under the NEP needs additional focus and funding.

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