



## Primary Health Care - Lessons from Kerala

### What is the issue?

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- Proper systems in Universal primary health care are crucial in India for achieving Universal Health Coverage, one of the SDGs.
- The experience of Kerala in transforming primary care has lessons for the country in achieving the Astana Declaration goals.

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### What is the Astana Declaration?

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- In October 2018, at Astana, Kazakhstan, world leaders declared their commitment to 'Primary Care'.
- The Astana Declaration aims to meet all people's health needs across the life course.
- This would be through comprehensive preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative services and palliative care.

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- A representative list of primary care services are provided in this, which includes but not limited to -

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- i. vaccination

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- ii. screenings
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  - iii. prevention, control and management of non-communicable and communicable diseases
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  - iv. care and services that promote, maintain and improve maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health
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  - v. mental health
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  - vi. sexual and reproductive health
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### **What is Kerala's experience in this regard?**

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- The 'Aardram mission' in Kerala aims at creating “People Friendly” Health Delivery System in the state.
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  - The approach is need-based and aims at treating every patient with ‘dignity’.
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  - In 2016, Kerala had, as part of the Aardram mission, attempted to re-design its primary care.
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- In the revamped primary care, Kerala tried to provide the services enlisted in the Astana declaration and more, with mixed results.
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  - These services cannot be provided without adequate human resources.
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  - It is nearly impossible to provide them with the current Indian norm of one primary care team for a population of 30,000.
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  - So Kerala tried to reduce the target population to 10,000, but even this turned out to be too high to be effective.
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  - It thus suggests that providing comprehensive primary care would require at least one team for 5,000 populations.
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  - This would mean a six-fold increase in the cost of manpower alone.

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## What does this call for?

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- **Fund** - Most successful primary care interventions allocate not more than 2,500 beneficiaries per team.

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- But the supply of more human resources would generate demand for services.

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- So there would be a corresponding increase in the cost of drugs, consumables, equipment and space.

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- So the commitment to provide comprehensive primary care would be meaningful only with a substantial increase in fund allocation.

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- **Training** - Providing the entire set of services is beyond the capacity of medical and nursing graduates without specialised training.

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- Practitioners in most good primary care systems are specialists, often with postgraduate training.

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- The Post Graduate Course in Family Medicine, which is the nearest India has to such a course, is available in very few institutions.

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- Kerala has addressed this challenge through short courses in specific areas.

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- E.g. management of diabetes mellitus, hypertension, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and depression

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- India has to build its capacity in this regard if it is to offer services as is planned in many States.

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- **Data** - Providers have to assume responsibility for the health of the population assigned to them and the population should trust them.

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- Both are linked to capacity, attitude and support from referral networks and the systemic framework.

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- It will not be possible unless the numbers assigned are within manageable proportions.

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- So access to longitudinal data on individuals will be helpful in achieving the link.
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- Thus, dynamic electronic health records and decision support through analysis of data are essential.
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- **Private sector** - The private sector provides primary care in most countries though it is paid for from the budget or insurance.
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- In India, more than 60% of primary care is provided by the private sector.
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- It can provide good quality primary care if there are systems to finance care and if it is prepared to invest in developing the needed capacities.
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- Devising and operating such a system (more fund management than insurance though it can be linked to insurance) is needed.
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**Source: The Hindu**

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