

Theme:

- On 15th August 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched 'National Digital Health Mission'(NDHM), which is a digital health ecosystem with unique health IDs for every citizen.
- The National Health ID stores all the health-related information such as disease history, diagnosis, prescription etc. The government of India aimed to digitise the health records of all citizens by the year 2022.
- The enrolment in this program is voluntary.
- Digital health ecosystem was first proposed in 'National Health Policy 2017'. And In 2018, NITI Ayog proposed the concept of a digital health ID in the blueprint of 'National Health Stack'.

Pros:

- National Health ID program can benefit all the parties involved - patients and healthcare professionals. By knowing the entire medical history, doctors can provide better treatment for the patients. And there will be no need to go through all the tests when consulting another doctor. This can save money & effort of patients.
- As everything will be recorded, this program instils fear & responsibility in healthcare professionals and hence improves accountability. So, this can reduce medical errors.
- This program is voluntary. So, this will not be against the right to privacy.
- With this program, the government will have so much data on the prevalent diseases, and the vulnerable age groups & regions etc. This data can be utilised using Artificial Intelligence to craft policies to improve the health of the citizens.
- This can also help insurance companies by reducing the scope of false claims.
- In general, patients are not able to understand the names of the medicines written by doctors due to their handwriting. With NDHM, prescriptions will be noted online, and hence patients can understand the names of prescribed medicines.
- As the charges can be paid through this ID, there is a scope of keeping a check on arbitrary charges by hospitals.

Cons:

- May compromise privacy because, with this program, sensitive health information will be in the hands of the government. If there is no strict implementation of privacy laws, the data may go into the hands of private players too.
- Digitalising health records is very expensive and may put an extra burden on the Indian economy, which is already facing a deep and prolonged slowdown.

- In the Indian healthcare sector, there is a shortage of human resources. So, digitalising health records can become a burden for healthcare institutes.

Challenges:

- Safeguarding the data & Protecting the privacy of enrolled citizens is a big challenge.
- Without a strong healthcare infrastructure and enough human resources in the healthcare sector, this attempt can be failed. So, building a strong healthcare infrastructure is much needed.
- To make policies based on the data gathered, consent issues may arise. Taking consent from a large number of citizens can be a difficult task and consent in terms of dead people can be a challenge.

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Lessons from other countries:

- The United States has Electronic medical records (EMR) system was started in 1970s. Even though it has not achieved its goal of 100% coverage, the adoption of EMR is on the rise.
- The UK implemented Electronic Health record system - NHS National Programme for IT in health (NPFIT) from the year 2005 to 2013. But it was stopped due to several reasons such as insufficient planning while deploying the project, data security risks, lack of trust in healthcare professionals etc. It is considered as one of the most expensive healthcare IT failures.

Conclusion:

If implemented well, National Digital Health Mission can transform the Indian healthcare system. But the scheme will be successful, only if the healthcare infrastructure is developed according to the needs. Along with it, a strict privacy protection policy will help in the success of National Health ID program.

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References:

1. [What is the National Health ID announced by PM Modi?](#)



Your Turn...

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