# India's Rural Health System

## What is the issue?

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Despite the Centre's efforts towards the ambitious health goals for 2020, the recent Gorakhpur health tragedy calls for an assessment of rural India’s health system.

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## What are the problems in this regard?

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- Recent CAG’s report on reproductive and child health highlights the dysfunctional aspects of the medical system in rural areas.
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- CAG found that in certain states about 50% of the PHCs (Primary Health Centres) did not have a doctor, while others had significant levels of vacancies.
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- It also brings out a range of other issues such as:
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1. inability of States to absorb the funds allocated.
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2. poor financial administration of hospitals.
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3. shortage of staff at PHCs, community health centres (CHCs) and district hospitals.
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4. lack of essential medicines.
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5. broken-down equipments.
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6. unfilled doctor vacancies.
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7. extraordinary patient load on a few referral hospitals.
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- Basic facilities in the form of health sub-centres, PHCs and CHCs in some states met only half the need.
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- This puts the pressure on a handful of referral institutions on the top as in the case of the Gorakhpur hospital.
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- As a result a large number of very sick patients are sent to such apex hospitals only as a last resort and not for immediate remedies.
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## What is the way forward?

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- Sustained **investment** in and **monitoring** of India's health system is of prime importance.
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- Ensuring **access** to a health facility with the requisite medical and nursing resources within a 3-km radius is of priority.
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- Moving to a **single payer system** with cost controls for efficient, strategic purchase of health care from private and public facilities is essential.
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- As the NITI Aayog has pointed out in its action agenda for 2020, the government has to recognise the **limitations of a market-led mechanism.**
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- It is thus high time that the government takes up the idea of providing health as pure **public good**.
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- Bringing equity in access to doctors, diagnostics and medicines for the rural population has to be a priority for the National Health Mission.
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**Source: The Hindu**

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