National Digital Health Mission (NDHM)

Why in news?

The National Digital Health Mission (NDHM) was announced by the Prime Minister on Independence Day.

What is the NDHM?

- The NDHM is part of the National Digital Health Blueprint (NDHB).
- [NDHB aims to enhance the healthcare delivery by setting up a core e-health database of international standards.
- It allows patients to have control over their health data.
- The NDHM envisages creating a national health ID for every Indian.
- It wants to make use technology to streamline processes such as record-keeping, sharing of healthcare data and similar healthcare processes.
- This well-timed move will help citizens make informed decisions on treatments.

Is the fund allocated enough?

- The NDHM is supposed to cover all government health programmes to begin with.
- This will be a huge exercise and would require more resources than the currently allocated ₹144 crore.
- This will make private participation a necessity given the strained finances of the Centre.

What is the potential of this mission?

- It has the potential to transform the healthcare sector.
- It can make the healthcare sector more technologically advanced, inclusive and delivery-driven.

What is the further kind of data that should be integrated?

- Such centralised data, combined with real-time Big Data analytics, can become a surveillance tool.
- Healthcare **data from wearable devices** are getting mainstreamed.

- This data is used by the healthcare providers, doctors and patients for diagnosis, if not for treatment.
- So, the NDHM should spell out its stand on collecting such data from individuals and integrating it with the unique health ID.

What are the challenges?

- The NDHM gives rise to logistical challenges and privacy concerns.
- It involves government collaboration between hospitals in both public as well as private sectors, labs, insurance firms, pharmacies and telemedicine.
- So, there is a **risk of exposing** individual healthcare data to hacking and commercial misuse.
- Although the NDHM is now a voluntary exercise, it could become mandatory for availing government health services.
- In such a context, ensuring the **safety** of individual health data becomes paramount.

What could be done?

- The government must gain the **confidence of all stakeholders**, including rights groups, before going ahead.
- There should be more **clarity on questions** such as:
    1. Who will maintain and manage the centralised repository of citizen's health data;
    2. Who will own the data — the individual or the state;
    3. Whether individuals can transfer the data between service providers and
    4. Whether the individual has the right to erase irrelevant healthcare data and maintain 'his or her right to be forgotten'.
- Insurance companies should not be allowed to misuse personal data.
- The NDHM must be in **compliance** with the global best practices on data privacy, like the EU's General Data Protection Regulation.
- The potential and pitfalls of digitisation of health data must be appreciated before moving ahead.

Source: Business Line



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