

National Digital Health Mission

[UPSC Notes]

What is National Digital Health Mission?

National Digital Health Mission was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 15th August 2020.

- It aims to strengthen the backbone required to support and enhance the digital infrastructure of the country,
- As per the government, it will NDHM will be the one-stop solution for the healthcare needs of the common man
- The best thing about the digital ecosystem in the healthcare domain is that it will eliminate the difficulty of maintaining long trails of paper-based health records, standing in long queues

Vision of NDHM

To create a digital health ecosystem nationwide that would support universal health coverage in an affordable, efficient, inclusive, accessible, safe, and timely manner that offers a wide range of data, information, and infrastructure services, and ensure confidentiality, security, and privacy of the health-related information.

Background of National Digital Health Mission

The National Health Policy 2017 envisions were to ensure the highest level of well-being and health for all ages people and to provide promotive health care orientation in all development policies. A Digital Health ID was proposed to reduce the risk of medical errors and increase the quality of care.

- In the context of this, the MoH&FM set up a committee to drive an implementation framework for National Health Stack(NHS). NHS was built with the aim of making the healthcare insurance system more robust and transparent.
- The Satyanarayana committee advised drafting a National Digital Health Blueprint to lay down and plan for a digital health mission
- Furthermore, the National Digital Mission recommended the establishment of the National Health Mission to offer digital healthcare services across the country.

Objectives of the National Digital Health Mission

Below we have jotted down the objectives of the National Digital Health Mission

- Establishing the digital health system to manage the health data, and to manage the requirements of the infrastructure for seamless services.
- National Digital Health Mission would have all the credible data on healthcare professionals, clinical establishments, health workers, pharmacies, and drugs.
- Establishing advanced personal health records by taking inspiration from the international standards. Additionally based on the individual's consent records can be easier shared between the individuals, healthcare professionals, and service providers.
- Promoting the participation of private players along with public health authorities.
- Promotion of CDS- Clinical Decision Support systems by healthcare professionals
- Making the healthcare services portable
- Identifying the health facilities, doctors, and people. Facilitating electronic signature, and ensuring the non-repudiable contracts. Additionally making digital payments, secure storage of digital records, and contracting people.

Components of the National Digital Health Mission

The components of NDHM are as follows:

- Health ID- It is crucial to standardize the identification of an individual across the healthcare provider, and the Health ID will be used for the unique identification of persons, authenticating them and sharing their health records with the informed consent of the patient.
- NDHM Health Records (PHR)- PHR is an electronic record of health-related information which can be drawn from multiple sources while being managed, shared, and controlled by the individual.
- Electronic Medical Record(EMR)- EMR web app is like a digital version of the patient's chart. It has the medical and treatment history from a single health facility.
- Health Facility Registry(HFR)- It includes both private and public health facilities including clinics, imaging centers, hospitals, diagnostic laboratories, pharmacies, etc. Enrolling in HFR would make it easier to get connected to India's digital health ecosystem.
- Healthcare Professionals Registry (HPR)- It includes all the healthcare professionals involved in delivering healthcare services across both traditional and modern systems of medicine.

Silent Features of the National Digital Health Mission

National Digital Health Mission is a digital health ecosystem under which every citizen of India will have a unique health ID, and health records with identifiers for health facilities, and doctors.

Other features of NDHM include:

- National Digital Health Mission comprises key 6 building blocks- HealthID, DigiDoctor, Personal Health Records, Health Facility Registry, Telemedicine, and E-pharmacy,
- The National Health Authority will take care of the design, build and implement the mission.
- The major building blocks of the mission are the health ID, DigiDoctor, and the health facility Registry will be operated, maintained, and owned by the Indian government
- Private stakeholders will get equal opportunity to create and integrate their own products for the market,

- Every Indian will get a health ID under the National Digital Health Mission that will store all the medical details of that individual including the treatment, prescriptions, reports, and discharge summaries.
- Health ID is a randomly generated 14-digit number that is used for the purposes of uniquely identifying people, and threading their health records (only with informed consent).
- The citizens have to give one-time access to their data to doctors and health providers during their visits to the hospital for consultation.

Benefits of the National Digital Health Mission

Take a look at the benefits of the National Digital Health Mission below:

- The implementation of NDHM would drive efficiency, effectiveness, and health service transparency, It would also provide accurate information to enable informed decisions which increase the accountability of healthcare providers.
- National Digital Health Mission will give choices to individuals of both public and private health services.
- National Digital Health Mission would enable a better continuum of health care.
- It would be a great addition for the researchers as they will be able to study various programmes and their effectiveness and interventions.
- NDHM will help establish a holistic, healthcare environment that would involve hospitals, insurance companies, and pharmacies and lead to a solid digital health infrastructure

Concerns with National Digital Health Mission

Apart from the scope of the National Digital Health Mission, there are some concerns lies as well such as:

- In the National Digital Health Mission, the data of millions of citizens will be stored without a data protection law in place.
- The NDHM mission overlaps with the fundamental right to privacy, and it does not fully align with the privacy principles advised by the experts.
- The blueprint doesn't ensure the safeguard against the commercial exploitation of sensitive information.
- Foreign surveillance

Scope Of NDHM

The scope of the National Digital Health Mission is as follows:

- Universal Health Coverage
- Health and Well-being for ALL
- Citizen-Centric Services
- Quality Care
- Accountability for Performance

- Creation of comprehensive and holistic health eco-system

Expected Outcomes of the National Digital Health Mission

The right implementation of the National Digital Health Mission can have the following outcomes:

- Citizens can get access to their health records just within 5 clicks
- The care is assured in a primary, secondary, and tertiary care
- National Digital Health Mission would allow the citizen to undergo a diagnostic test only once and follow up the treatments from various healthcare providers
- At a single point, all the healthcare services will be provided

National Digital Health Mission- Way Forward

One of the biggest concerns that we have mentioned above about NDHM is regarding the data privacy and security of patients. The data of patients must remain confidential and secure.

- Additionally, the failure of a similar National Health Service (NHS) in the UK would be learning, and then according to that the technical and all related deficiencies must be addressed proactively.
- The National Digital Health Mission needs to be in sync with the Government Schemes like Ayushman Bharat Yojana and other IT-enabled schemes like Reproductive Child Health Care and NIKSHAY etc.
- By establishing a digital health ecosystem, the National Digital Health Mission will meet the goals of National Health Policy 2017.
- The success of the National Digital Health Mission would drive a new beginning for the Indian digital healthcare ecosystem, and enable the better delivery of the healthcare services moving forward.