

# Low-cost drugs key to health for all

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**NEW DELHI:** Setting up a national network of pharmacies to produce generic low-cost drugs and establishing a mechanism of bulk purchase of patented drugs to make them affordable are some ways to make healthcare accessible to all, recommend the country's top public health experts in The Lancet: India Series Special released on Monday.

Health costs push 39 million

of India's 1.2 billion people below the poverty line each year, with out-of-pocket spending accounting for 78.1% of total spending on health. Insurance and the public sector account for a very small proportion of the burden, unlike in the West where 80% of the spending is by governments.

"To create a health system that works for all, public spending on health should be gradually raised from the current 1.1% to 6% and 15% of tax revenues — including new taxes on tobacco, alcohol and unhealthy foods

— should be earmarked for health," said Dr K Srinath Reddy, president of the Public Foundation of India and Indian editor of the series that a wide-ranging review of India's under-resourced health system.

The special issue gives an overview of the most critical challenges facing healthcare delivery: health financing, human resources for health, infectious diseases, reproductive health, chronic diseases and injuries and

health care and equity.

"India's continued economic growth will be at risk if adequate steps are not taken quickly to invest in the health of its citizens," said Richard Horton, editor, The Lancet, which has published similar series on Mexico, South Africa and China.

More than one in five Indians has a chronic disease such as heart diseases, diabetes or cancer, while over one in 10 has more than one disease, said the paper on chronic diseases.

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