

Doctor deficit in tribal Odisha up 147% in 2 yrs

It is apparently a big letdown of tribals by the Odisha Government. Doctor vacancies at the Primary Health Centres (PHCs) have ballooned by an astounding 147 per cent in between 2013 and 2015.

Sample this: PHCs in tribal areas had a vacancy of around 83 doctors in 2013. The vacancy, however in 2015, took a quantum jump to touch 205. Not only this; the State Government has also failed to add on any new PHC since 2013 when an assessment shows a need of at least 23 more PHCs in tribal areas.

If the first referral centres or Community Health Centres (CHCs) are taken into account, the shortfall of specialists in tribal areas stands higher at over 461, the highest in the country. Paediatricians' and gynaecologists' shortfall account for around half of the total specialists' shortage, which is again the highest in the country.

What is of concern here is Odisha has the highest proportion of BPL rural tribal population in the country. According to the Tendulkar methodology, Odisha with over 63 per cent of rural tribal population below the poverty line tops the nation. And when anaemia, malaria, diarrhoea load is highest in the tribal area resulting in higher infant, maternal and crude fatality rate. Data suggest how pneumonia accounts for maximum infant death in the State in Koraput. It is ANMs or female health workers who run the show in tribal areas. Data suggest over 3,100 health workers are in position in tribal districts against the requirement of a little over 2,680.

But the Tribal Sub Plan (TSP), mandated to uplift tribals from poverty and improve accessibility to health services, shows a poor progress card since last two fiscal years. From a high of around 91 per cent utilisation in 2013-14, the figure slid to mere 57 per cent in 2015-16 despite an increase in outlay by a whopping 62 per cent during the period 2013-14 to 2015-16. And sources indicated that a major chunk of the TSP outlay in the State caters to the rural development and healthcare sectors as they together account for around 25 per cent of total outlay.

When the annual plan outlay for Odisha under TSP in 2013-14 was around Rs 5,620 crore, it has touched around Rs 9,134 crore in 2015-16 and Rs 10,467 crore in 2016-17. But the actual utilisation in has only crawled to touch Rs 5,190 crore in 2015-16 from Rs 5,100 crore in 2013-14. The result: Odisha has to live up with more and more Nagadas.