

# Centre plans ad blitzkrieg for Jan Aushadhi revamp

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THE UPA government is set to launch a Rs 15-crore advertising blitzkrieg for a Rs 150-crore revamp of the Jan Aushadhi scheme started in 2008.

Free drugs in government hospitals has been a proposed flagship programme of the Centre since a report of an expert group on universal health coverage pointed out that 70 per cent of out-of-pocket expenditure was on health. But having footed less than a third of the projected expenditure, UPA II is in no position to claim the initiative as its flagship.

On the other hand, the revamp of Jan Aushadhi requires a fraction of the budgetary allocation but can show government commitment to improving availability of generic drugs.

The department of pharmaceuticals plans to set up 3,000 stores under the 12th five-year plan that will stock, to start with, 360 drugs, including the essential ones, and operate along the lines of the medical supplies corporations in Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan.

Twenty eight states have a free drugs policy on paper and most of the funding for the schemes comes from the states.

During 2013-14, for example, the health ministry disbursed Rs 1,961 crore under NRHM for free drugs, while states paid Rs 3,500 crore. The

central share includes 5 per cent incentive for states that have announced the scheme. Total Rs 6,000 crore is required for the scheme.

Earlier this year, Punjab, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Assam and MP joined the free drugs initiative but here too the UPA government share of money is too small to publicise it as a central scheme.

Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Assam, UP, Punjab, MP, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Orissa have formulated state schemes. Jharkhand has announced the scheme but is yet to make it fully functional.

A health ministry official said: "We issued ads when the state schemes were launched but it is difficult to present the free drugs scheme as a flagship because it is the states that are footing most of the bill. The programme does not have the kind of budgetary allocation it requires. That is why it does not feature prominently in government publicity material."

Interestingly, the architect of the new Jan Aushadhi plan — joint secretary, pharmaceuticals, Pradeep Yadav, — was once in the running to become chief of the health ministry proposed central procurement agency for drugs. Medicines bought by the agency from the market were to be supplied to government institutions/states that do not have a procurement setup.

Jan Aushadhi.