



Health: A non-issue in Indian elections

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Madam,

Elections come and go every five years and bring promises with them each time; however, there is a lack of focus on most issues of prime concern. Health and education remain neglected areas in political discourse of the nation wherein emotive issues like

corruption, caste and creed dominate the discussions on television and print media. Manifestos are an integral component of the election campaigns. The manifestos of three important national political parties were assessed to look at their focus on health issues. The salient points are mentioned in the Table.

Table: Health related promises in manifestos of some national political parties.

Item	Indian National Congress[1]	Bharatiya Janata Party[2]	Communist Party of India (Marxist)[3]
GDP share for health	3%	-	5%
Theme	Right to health	New Healthcare policy - Swachh Bharat by 2019	Reversing privatisation
Jobs	60 lakh jobs	Address shortfall	-
School	Toilet in every school	Focus on health and hygiene	Strengthening sanitation and food schemes
Salient promises	Strengthening universal vaccination; HIV care; Rashtriya Swasthya Bima and Janani Suraksha Yojna; institutional deliveries and maternal health	Modernisation of services; Initiate National health Assurance Mission; AIIMS in each state; Universalise 108; Focus on mobile healthcare; National Mosquito Control Mission	Extension of Employees' State Insurance scheme; Free of cost medicine; Price control of drugs; Defend Indian Patent Law
Research	-	High priority to chronic disease research	Regulation of clinical trials
Medical Education	-	Reassessing role of regulatory bodies	Medical colleges in North East & in poor states

We found that manifestos make sweeping promises with broad ideas mentioned as promises. Manifestos do not talk of the amount of funding required to meet each of the promises and are also silent on the source for creating the funds. Medical education is not much of a priority and the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test does

not find a mention in these manifestos. There is a glaring silence on ethical issues concerning human trials and the corruption in Medical Council of India. This sorry state is probably a result of citizens' disinterest in creating a constituency for voting on matters like provisions of adequate, affordable, and accessible healthcare.

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