

## STRENGTHENING HEALTHCARE QUALITY FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH: ADDRESSING SERVICE GAPS AND ENHANCING PATIENT TRUST

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### Abstract

Healthcare is a key component of economic strength, fuelling job creation, driving income growth, and shaping national progress. However, despite its rapid expansion, the healthcare sector remains plagued by systemic inefficiencies, uneven quality, and barriers to access. Both public and private hospitals grapple with overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, and inconsistent patient experiences issues that erode trust, lower satisfaction, and deter people from seeking timely care. Ensuring high-quality healthcare, particularly in public hospitals that serve the majority, is essential for driving economic growth and stability. A system that fosters patient trust, enhances satisfaction and ensures loyalty will encourage people to seek care when needed, reducing strain on private facilities and optimizing national healthcare spending. Policymakers should enforce strict service standards, accelerate digital health integration, and significantly increase healthcare investments to ensure equitable access for everyone. Enhancing patient feedback systems, prioritizing ongoing professional training, and using technology to engage patients in their care will strengthen trust and streamline efficiency. A strong public healthcare system will improve overall health outcomes and reduce individual medical costs, promote a healthy workforce, and drive economic growth. This research identifies the critical factors that shape service quality, exposing gaps in healthcare delivery and offering data-driven solutions to enhance efficiency and accessibility.

**Keywords:** Healthcare Quality, Patient Trust, Economic Growth, Service Gaps, Digital Health

### 1. Introduction

Healthcare is one of the largest sectors, both in terms of revenue and employment. Healthcare is a crucial element of human well-being, significantly aiding in enhancing quality of life. An effective healthcare system ensures quick access to medical care, fosters public health initiatives, and promotes

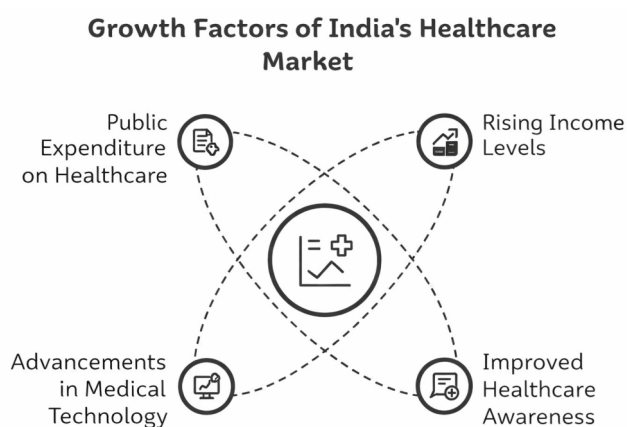
medical research and innovation (Bhattacharya et al., 2024). The healthcare industry is one of the largest and most rapidly expanding sectors, driven by a growing population, increasing income levels, breakthroughs in medical technology, and government initiatives. The relationship between healthcare and economic prosperity is well-

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documented, as an effective healthcare system guarantees public well-being and promotes economic growth.

### 1.1 Overview of the Indian healthcare system and economics

India's healthcare economy is growing rapidly due to increasing demand, government initiatives, and investments from private sector players. It is projected to reach \$372 billion by 2025, spurred by rising income levels, improved healthcare awareness, and advancements in medical technology. The public expenditure on healthcare in India touched 1.9% of GDP in FY24 (IBEF Report, 2024).



**Figure 1: Growth factors of Indian Healthcare Market**

India's healthcare service delivery system is divided into two parts: public and private. In the public healthcare system that is government, there are a limited number of secondary and tertiary care facilities in key cities and an emphasis on providing fundamental healthcare services through Primary Healthcare Centres (PHCs) in rural areas. However, private sector organisations primarily provide secondary, tertiary, and quaternary care facilities, which are mainly found in metropolitan, tier-I, and tier-II cities (Chokshi et al., 2016).

In a country with a healthy population, workforce

efficiency improves, absenteeism decreases, and sustainable development thrives (Jandavath & Byram, 2016). However, despite its vital importance, healthcare systems frequently face challenges that hinder their effectiveness. A lack of service quality is a critical issue affecting both public and private healthcare institutions.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Service Quality and Gaps

Service quality in healthcare institutions refers to providers' ability to deliver patient-centric, effective, and efficient medical care while ensuring patient safety, accessibility, and satisfaction (Park et al., 2016). Higher service quality leads to better patient outcomes, increased trust in healthcare providers, and greater efficiency in service delivery. Unfortunately, the Indian healthcare system grapples with poor infrastructure, overcrowded hospitals, and inconsistent patient experiences, leading to inefficiencies across public and private facilities (Chaudhary, 2015). These shortcomings not only impair patient care but also erode trust in healthcare providers, discouraging individuals from seeking timely medical assistance. Additionally, high costs associated with private hospitals force patients to seek healthcare services from public providers, limiting patients' decision-making power towards care providers (Havighurst, 1986).

### 2.2 Trust in Healthcare

Trust is a vital factor in evaluating healthcare effectiveness, patient satisfaction, adherence to treatments, and overall health outcomes (Sertan et al., 2023). When healthcare trust diminishes, it can delay medical care, worsen health conditions, and increase financial strain on individuals and systems

alike (Mollborn et al., 2005). Addressing these trust issues is crucial for constructing a better healthcare framework that is both effective and patient-centric. In light of these challenges, this study gathers evidence on current service gaps, patient trust issues, and their broader economic implications. By examining these interrelated factors, the research aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of the deficiencies in the healthcare system and their repercussions for the stability of the national economy.

The primary objective of this study is to explore strategies for improving healthcare service quality, enhancing patient trust, and ultimately fostering economic growth. The research intends to identify key areas for improvement and provide actionable recommendations for policymakers, healthcare administrators, and other stakeholders to create a more robust and efficient healthcare system.

### 3. Methodology

This study explores the relationship between healthcare service quality, patient trust, and economic growth in the Indian context. Relevant literature was identified using keywords such as healthcare service quality, trust in hospitals, public health inefficiencies, and healthcare economics. The study's inclusion criteria comprised 1) Studies analysing healthcare service quality and their impact on trust, 2) Research highlighting service quality improvement techniques in healthcare, and 3) Official government publications and policy reports related to healthcare development and economic planning. Exclusion criteria included 1) Studies discussing service quality but unrelated to the healthcare sector, and 2) duplicate studies analysing the same variables without contributing new insights.

**Table 1: Summary of literature discussing gaps in service delivery**

Author	Service delivery gaps	About the study
(Jandavath & Byram, 2016)	Doctors' Performance, Doctors' training, Patient satisfaction, Treatment cost.	Inconsistent clinical performance leads to varied patient experiences and affects overall treatment outcomes. Inconsistent clinical performance leads to varied patient experiences and affects overall treatment outcomes. Poor service quality and inadequate communication reduce patient satisfaction and trust in healthcare providers. High and unpredictable treatment expenses create financial stress and impact access to timely care.

Author	Service delivery gaps	About the study
(J. K. Sharma & Narang, 2011)	Perceived Quality, quality services, availability of doctors and medical equipment, poor-quality drugs	Inconsistent service delivery, delays, and lack of personalized care affect the perceived quality of healthcare. Shortage of skilled professionals and essential medical tools limits access to timely and effective treatment. The use of substandard or expired medications compromises treatment outcomes and undermines patient trust.
(Thakkar et al., 2022)	Staff training, Hygiene, and safety	Inadequate staff training leads to inconsistent service delivery and reduced patient satisfaction. Poor hygiene practices in healthcare settings increase the risk of infections and compromise care quality. Lack of proper safety protocols endangers both patients and staff, affecting overall trust in the healthcare system.
(Bhardwaj & Chawla, 2013)	Reliability, accuracy, timeliness, and security fronts.	Patients face inconsistency in service delivery, with frequent discrepancies between promised and actual care. Diagnostic and treatment errors occur due to insufficient checks and lack of updated protocols. Delays in treatment, admissions, and discharges reduce patient satisfaction and worsen health outcomes. Inadequate data protection and poor confidentiality practices weaken patient trust in the system.

<b>Author</b>	<b>Service delivery gaps</b>	<b>About the study</b>
(Narang, 2010)	Feedback and opinion facility, availability of drugs and access to women.	Lack of structured mechanisms for collecting patient feedback limits opportunities for service improvement. Inadequate presence of female healthcare providers creates barriers for women, especially in conservative regions, to access care. Frequent stock -outs of essential medicines hinder effective treatment and reduce patient satisfaction.
(Meesala & Paul, 2018)	Timely delivery of services, empathy, billing accuracy, proper communication, promptness of communication, staff responsiveness.	Delays in diagnosis, treatment, and discharge processes reduce patient satisfaction and affect clinical outcomes. A lack of emotional support and understanding from healthcare staff leads to reduced patient trust and negative experiences. Inadequate explanation of procedures, treatment plans, or conditions results in confusion and fear among patients. Slow or inattentive staff responses to patient needs impact the perception of care quality and safety.
(Duggirala et al., 2008)	Negative word of mouth, availability, and quality infrastructure.	Dissatisfied patients share poor experiences. Availability and quality of physical facilities such as equipment, ward arrangement, hospital building layout, waiting rooms, etc., are important for higher patient wellbeing and

#### 4. Healthcare Program for Service Quality in India

India's healthcare service delivery gaps stem from multiple causes, including inadequate infrastructure, workforce shortages, financial barriers, and a lack of standardised care. These issues are further intensified by rural-urban

disparities and limited health awareness. In response, the government has launched several targeted initiatives to address these challenges. The following table 2 highlights service delivery gaps, their causes, and preventive programs designed to address these causes:

**Table 2: Healthcare Program for Service Quality in India**

Gap in Service Delivery	Causes that are addressed	Preventive Programme (Government Initiative)
<p><b>Overcrowding in hospitals</b> : Emergency department overcrowding impacts patient health and satisfaction. (R. Sharma et al., 2021) . Overcrowding leads to poor quality care (Furterer, 2018). Overcrowding in hospitals leads to severe mismanagement (G. et al., 2020) . Mismanagement of patient flow and lack of patient beds cause overcrowding (Amorim et al., 2019).</p>	<p>Limited infrastructure and high patient load in urban centres</p>	<p>PM-ABHIM aims to develop healthcare infrastructure in both urban and rural areas, focusing specifically on Tier -II and Tier - III cities. It emphasizes the construction of hospitals, laboratories, and wellness centres, as well as the improvement of disease surveillance, training of health workers, and enhancement of emergency preparedness nationwide (PM-ABHIM, 2021).</p>
<p><b>Waiting time:</b> Overcrowding increases patient waiting time, which increases mortality (Kumar et al., 2019) . Managing waiting time is crucial for treatment cost and patient retention (Mehra, 2016). Longer wait times may harm health outcomes, decrease the benefits of therapy, and discourage future visits to medical facilities (Shaikh et al., 2018) . Waiting time leads to dangerous effects such as psychological discomfort and anxiety (Sriram &amp; Noochpoung, 2018).</p>	<p>Inequitable access to patients from lower economic backgrounds in private hospitals. Gender discrimination persists. There are fewer emergency medical personnel available.</p>	<p>Programs like the National Digital Health Mission (NDHM), which digitalise the scheduling system to improve efficiency, reduce delays in consultation and diagnostics. eSanjeevni is a national telemedicine service that enables remote consultations, reducing the need for in-person physician visits (Dastidar et al., 2024).</p>

Gap in Service Delivery	Causes that are addressed	Preventive Programme (Government Initiative)
<p><b>Inadequate access in rural areas</b> : Lack of infrastructure, manpower, and drugs results in poor healthcare access in rural areas. Additionally, the lack of connectivity in healthcare centres at different levels (Taqi et al., 2017) . Below below-poverty population has a serious problem of insufficient access to primary healthcare (Iyengar &amp; Dholakia, 2012)</p>	<p>Unequal distribution of healthcare facilities and professionals</p>	<p>Ayushman Bharat - Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs), it aims to provide free primary healthcare services, including preventive, promotive and basic curative care, primarily in rural and underserved areas (Bhattacharya et al., 2024).</p>
<p><b>Trained medical staff</b> : Due to insufficient medical colleges and nursing institutes, it does not meet the country's healthcare demand. Most of the trained professionals prefer urban areas due to better pay and facilities, leaving rural areas understaffed. Healthcare workers do not get upskilling opportunities, which affects quality and the shortage of the workforce.</p>	<p>Low doctor -patient ratio; insufficient training and incentives.</p>	<p>National Health Mission (NHM) supports the development, training, and recruitment of doctors, nurses, ASHAs and other frontline workers, especially in rural areas. It also funds in-service training programs, skill development initiatives and performance incentives to enhance healthcare service delivery (NHM-Report, 2013).</p>
<p><b>Poor quality and inconsistent services:</b> Long admission and discharge procedure, non-uniform admission policy, ineffective health information systems are identified as administration-related factors (Kanwar et al., 2015).</p>	<p>Lack of standard protocols and monitoring systems</p>	<p>National Accreditation Board for Hospitals &amp; Healthcare Providers (NABH) guidelines ensure quality, safety and patient-centered care in hospitals and healthcare institutions in India. It enables hospitals to enhance service quality and build trust in patients (Bodade &amp; Bodade, 2021).</p>
<p><b>Low patient satisfaction and trust</b> : In a healthcare setting, limited doctor -patient interaction negatively affects satisfaction. Healthcare staff showing less empathy towards patients leads to a loss of trust. Inadequate discussion about treatment or procedures impacts satisfaction and trust . Negative word -of-mouth communication generates low trust in healthcare facilities. Medical negligence, report of mistreatment or</p>	<p>Poor communication, delays, lack of transparency</p>	<p>Mera Aspataal (My Hospital) is a Patient feedback and grievance redressal system to improve service quality and accountability in the healthcare system. It allows patients to provide real -time feedback on healthcare services received at public hospitals (Priyadarshi &amp; Kumar, 2020).</p>

Gap in Service Delivery	Causes that are addressed	Preventive Programme (Government Initiative)
<p><b>Inefficient referral system and continuity of care :</b> In the absence of centralized electronic medical records, patient history frequently becomes fragmented throughout transitions, adversely affecting diagnosis and continuity of therapy. Insufficient coordination among primary, secondary, and tertiary healthcare levels impedes the patient healthcare journey.</p>	<p>Absence of digital records and coordination among service levels</p>	<p>eSanjeevani—National telemedicine service for streamlined consultation and referrals (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2025) . It supports both doctor-to-patient and doctor-to-doctor services , which improves access to healthcare, especially in rural areas, and helps streamline referrals and reduce patient load in hospitals.</p>
<p><b>High out-of-pocket expenditure:</b> High treatment cost and delay in treatment causes financial distress on patient. Many people from India, who work in informal sector does not posses health insurance which increases financial burden during medical emergency. Public facilities often face a shortage of medicine or drugs, forcing patients to buy from outside with full cost. Due to low government expenditure on public healthcare, compels many people to seek private care.</p>	<p>Inadequate insurance coverage and public funding</p>	<p>Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM -JAY) is a government health insurance scheme that provides free hospitalisation coverage upto Rs. 5 lakh per family per year (Joseph et al., 2021).</p>
<p><b>Lack of preventive care and health awareness:</b> Educational institutions should provide instruction on preventive care and health awareness. Insufficient access to routine testing for illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, and cancer results in late -stage diagnosis. Most people in rural areas lack knowledge about hygiene, nutrition and early symptoms of diseases.</p>	<p>Focus on curative services, not preventive strategies.</p>	<p>Intensified Mission Indradhanush a government initiative to increase immunization coverage (Dhawan et al., 2023) . Fit India Movement promotes healthy lifestyle habits and physical fitness (Mohanty &amp; Ganesh, 2024). The National Tobacco Control Programme aim to reduce tobacco consumption and related health risks through public awareness campaigns (Kaur &amp; Jain, 2011).</p>

### 5. Recommendations for Improving Healthcare Service Quality, Enhancing Patient Trust, and Fostering Economic Growth

Despite continuous efforts made by healthcare policymakers and the government to improve

service delivery and quality, there are still some issues that have not been fully addressed. To address these difficulties, targeted policy recommendations have been offered, ranging from boosting infrastructure and training

programs to expanding insurance coverage and digital integration. The addition of new technologies like AI and machine learning is also advocated to optimize resources, improve diagnostics, and elevate overall service quality in

a cost-effective and scalable manner. The following table 3 illustrates numerous major gaps in healthcare service delivery and quality that the government has not fully addressed:

**Table 3: Recommendations for Improving Healthcare Service Quality, Patient Trust, and Fostering Economic Growth.**

<b>Gap in Service Delivery/Quality</b>	<b>Causes that are not fully addressed</b>	<b>Recommendation to Policymakers (Government)</b>
<b>Workforce shortage:</b> it can be avoided by partnering with medical colleges for internships, offering in-house training, and providing incentives for staff retention.	Limited medical education seats, poor retention in rural areas	Expand medical and paramedical training institutions, especially in underserved areas. Provide scholarships and incentives for students to work in rural postings to address workforce shortages and ensure equitable distribution of healthcare professionals.
<b>Extended waiting times :</b> using digital appointment systems, triage protocols and optimising staff scheduling to manage patient flow.	Overburdened facilities and staff	Upgrade existing hospitals with better facilities, expand hospital capacities, and implement digital appointment and triage systems to reduce patient waiting time and improve service efficiency.
<b>High cost for treatment:</b> By offering transparent pricing, promoting generic medications and collaborating with insurance providers for cashless services can prevent the patient cost burden.	Inadequate insurance coverage, costly private care	Strengthen PM-JAY by increasing its coverage and benefits. Introduce regulatory frameworks to monitor and control pricing in the private healthcare sector, making quality care more affordable and reducing the financial burden on patients
<b>Low patient satisfaction and trust :</b> Implementation of a proper feedback mechanism for continuous improvement, as well as providing empathy and communicating about treatment results, in building trust in patients.	Poor communication, rushed consultations, lack of empathy	Train healthcare staff in effective communication, empathy, and patient handling. Set up structured feedback systems to regularly assess patient satisfaction and introduce reforms based on feedback for continuous improvement.

<b>Gap in Service Delivery/Quality</b>	<b>Causes that are not fully addressed</b>	<b>Recommendation to Policymakers (Government)</b>
<p><b>Poor referral system:</b> Implementation of an electronic referral system and maintaining clear communication between healthcare centres is required.</p>	<p>Weak coordination between primary, secondary, and tertiary care</p>	<p>Implement centralized digital referral systems and link Health and Wellness Centres ( HWCs) to district hospitals . This will streamline patient journeys, avoid duplication of efforts, and ensure timely specialist care.</p>
<p><b>Lack of preventive Healthcare:</b> Organising health camps, arranging awareness sessions and regular screening to educate and detect early health risks can help to fill service gap.</p>	<p>Inadequate health literacy and promotion</p>	<p>Launch sustained community awareness campaigns . Collaborate with schools t o integrate basic health education and instil preventive practices from a young age.</p>
<p><b>Rural- urban access gap :</b> Collaboration with local clinics for outreach and the use of telemedicine services can improve access for rural areas population.</p>	<p>Poor infrastruc ture in rural areas</p>	<p>Invest in telemedicine, mobile health units, bridging urban -rural healthcare gap, deploying mobile medical units, and expanding telemedicine services to provide timely consultations and to reduce the need for travel specially in rural areas.</p>
<p><b>Poor Health Monitoring &amp; Crisis Management:</b> Execution of real -time data tracking, early warning systems, and regular emergency drills to enhance preparedness and timely response is required.</p>	<p>Outdated systems and data silos</p>	<p>Strengthen Integrated Dis ease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) by adopting real-time data sharing and eliminating outdated manual processes. It will improve readiness for health crises and timely public health interventions</p>
<p><b>Uneven quality standards across hospitals:</b> The adoption of standardized protocols, such as NABH, and regular quality audits are necessary to maintain consistent service levels.</p>	<p>Lack of monitoring and standard protocols</p>	<p>Mandate NABH accreditation, Conduct periodic quality audits and introduce incentive -based system s to encourage compliance with service quality standards.</p>
<p><b>Underutilization of technology in service improvement:</b> Integration of digital tools, AI diagnostics can improve accuracy and enhance patient care.</p>	<p>Manual processes, lack of digital adoption</p>	<p>Promote the use of AI and machine learning for predictive analytics, patient monitoring, diagnostics, and resource optimization to enhance efficiency and reduce errors</p>

## 6. Conclusion

This research examined the intricate relationship between the quality of healthcare services, patient trust, and economic growth within the Indian context. By studying the current literature, government documents, and healthcare policy structures, numerous significant deficiencies in service delivery were identified. The issues encompass a lack of adequately trained medical personnel, overcrowded healthcare facilities, substantial out-of-pocket costs, and ineffective referral mechanisms, all of which undermine patient trust and satisfaction. The results distinctly emphasize that the quality of service is fundamental in establishing patient trust, which subsequently affects healthcare utilization, health outcomes, and overall economic productivity. Government initiatives are instrumental in addressing these challenges; however, deficiencies persist in their implementation, reach, and technological integration. To strengthen the healthcare system, policy reforms must prioritise enhancing quality through the adoption of digital health technologies, equitable infrastructure development, and the implementation of community-centred care models. Moreover, the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies has the potential to significantly enhance diagnostic processes, optimise workflows, and reduce human error, consequently improving overall efficiency and outcomes. By addressing these service gaps through a comprehensive strategy, India can cultivate a more reliable, effective, and economically significant healthcare system one that not only delivers treatment but also empowers its citizens.

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## 8. Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that they have no known financial, professional, or personal conflict of interest that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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