



SHARING THE MISSION

Industry has a critical role to play in Covid vaccination programme

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THE GOVERNMENT has made massive efforts in strategising for a mega vaccination programme. Indian industry, which has been a partner in the mission since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, is now gearing itself to participate in this critical endeavour.

Since the start of the lockdown, companies have re-engineered themselves to design and manufacture critical care equipment, drugs and medical supplies, much of which was imported earlier. Indian companies have also excelled in manufacturing vaccines and are slated to supply them to other countries. This has resulted in a huge brand recognition for India as the pharmacy of the world.

The next stage of the battle against COVID-19 is the vaccination drive. The mission, which kicked off in India on January 16 is being conducted in three phases. In the first phase, the drive will cover three crore healthcare and frontline workers. Next in line would be those above the age of 50 and those below the age of 50 with co-morbidities, who together are numbered at around 27 crore.

The programme will be driven by robust technology and with the aid of the unique digital platform, the CoWIN Vaccine Delivery Management System. The system which will provide real-time information on vaccine stocks as well as track each vaccine beneficiary will be a central pillar of the government's inoculation programme.

Apart from the two vaccines approved for emergency use, multiple other vaccines are in the pipeline. This highlights the need for a common legislative framework, covering areas such as Intellectual Property Rights, limiting liability and compensation. Industry can collaborate with the government in terms of vaccine pharmacovigilance, by providing regulatory support and by helping in the enforcement of the regulations.

Indian industry and business organisations have a critical role in supporting the exercise. The private sector can step in right at the first phase of vaccination of healthcare and frontline workers, and also play an important role during the later phases, especially in terms of expanding coverage to more demographic classes. At the same time, industry would continue to provide regular inputs and recommendations at various stages of the programme.

First, industry is contributing through logistical and maintenance responsibilities, while the government focuses on safety and quality of vaccines throughout the supply chain. We expect this partnership to extend to the vaccination programme as well.

Second, apart from the two vaccines approved for emergency use, multiple other vaccines are in the pipeline. This highlights the need for drafting a common legislative framework, covering areas such as Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), limiting liability and compensation. Industry can collaborate with the government in terms of vaccine pharmacovigilance, by providing regulatory support and by helping in the enforcement of the regulations—all these are critical for the equitable distribution of vaccines.

Three, companies can undertake to vaccinate their employees at their own cost as soon as sufficient stocks are available. This exercise will alleviate the pressure on the government,

in terms of both delivery and cost. We believe that an additional 10-crore workers in the formal sector and local communities could be quickly brought into the inoculation fold with the participation of businesses.

A key benefit of this early vaccination could be the faster resumption of normal economic activity. This could, in turn, generate greater confidence among consumers in returning to markets. Thus, the economy could be revived even while the government undertakes the vaccination programme for the vulnerable sections of society.

Four, a large part of the Indian population still lacks health insurance. During these times, therefore, we need to step up the health insurance penetration in the country. The government and industry can play an active role in bringing more people under the security net of insurance, by adding vaccination under various insurance schemes.

While India embarks on its biggest vaccination programme, it is vital that strategies are developed for the equitable distribution of the vaccines. Industry stands ready to step in and scale up efforts, especially during a crisis, which requires concerted efforts from all stakeholders for resetting India's growth trajectory.

The writer is president-designate, Confederation of Indian Industry, and chairman, CII task-force on COVID vaccine