Special focus: Pharmaceutical Industry News

FICCI-EY Report: Indian Pharmaceutical Industry Projected to Hit US$130 Billion by 2030

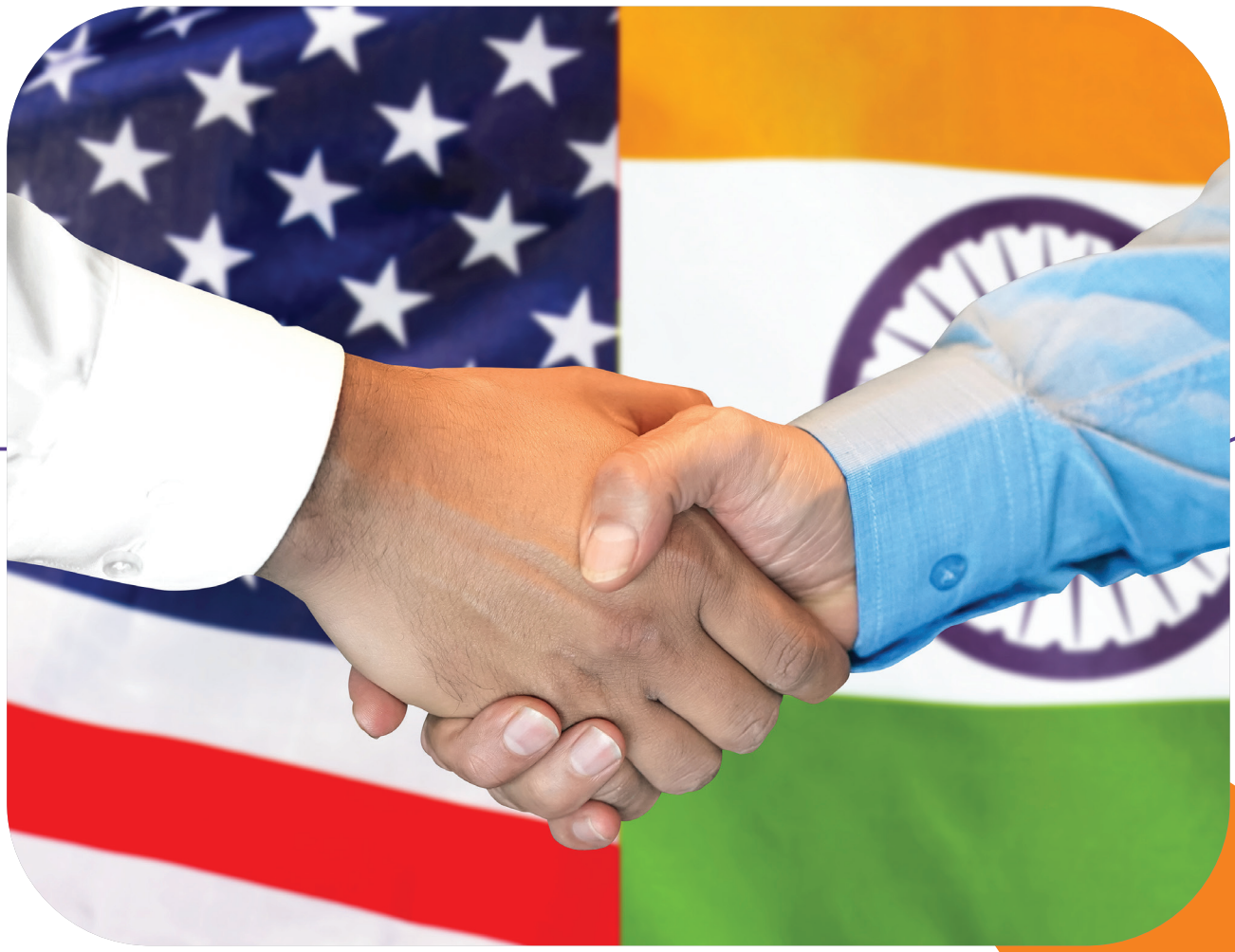
On May 15th, Mr. Apurva Chandra, Secretary of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India, unveiled the FICCI-EY report titled 'Decoding India's Healthcare Landscape'. The report highlights India's global standing in pharmaceutical production, ranking third by volume, and its reputation for generic medicines and low-cost vaccines. India is a major supplier of essential vaccines, fulfilling a significant portion of global demand. The report projects the Indian pharmaceutical market will reach US$130 billion by 2030, with India accounting for 60% of global vaccine production and exporting pharmaceuticals at three times the rate of its imports.

Healthcare infrastructure in India has seen substantial growth, with a marked increase in hospitals, medical colleges, and nursing staff. Over the past two decades, the number of medical colleges has nearly tripled. India also ranks highly as a destination for medical tourism.

Digital healthcare initiatives such as the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission and the CoWIN App have significantly improved healthcare access. Government hospital bed capacity has increased from 470,000 in 2005 to 850,000 in 2021.

The report outlines key areas for improvement to achieve India's 2047 healthcare vision. These include increasing the number of doctors and nurses, expanding hospital bed availability, achieving universal health insurance coverage, and establishing a medical college in every district. Additionally, reducing out-of-pocket drug costs and enhancing digital healthcare access are emphasized as essential steps.

Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance seeks stronger US-India partnership for affordable medicine



The Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA), representing Indian generic drugmakers, met in Washington D.C. to urge for a strong trade partnership between the US and India. This partnership would focus on making both countries less reliant on foreign sources for medicine production.

The IPA cited a study by IQVIA Institute highlighting India's role in supplying affordable medication to the US. According to the report, Indian companies supply nearly half of all generic prescriptions in the US, resulting in over $1.3 trillion saved in healthcare costs over the past decade.

Sharvil Patel, IPA Vice President, emphasized the importance of this partnership, aligning it with President Biden's focus on strengthening US supply chains for critical goods. Vinita Gupta, CEO of Lupin, further stressed the initiative's significance, going beyond trade to strengthen the overall health infrastructure for both nations. She also mentioned plans to expand this partnership to other countries. The meeting concluded with Sudarshan Jain, IPA Secretary General, reiterating their commitment to working with the US government to move this "Affordable Medicine Trade Partnership" forward.

India boosts SEARO with affordable medical solutions

India, recognized as the pharmaceutical capital of the world, reinforced the SEARO region with affordable medical countermeasures, as stated by Union Health Secretary Apurva Chandra. Chandra chaired a high-level meeting titled “Advancing Health and Well-Being of Billions in WHO South-East Asia Region” in Geneva on 27th May 2024. The event, a side-session of the 77th World Health Assembly, was co-hosted by the WHO Regional Office for Southeast Asia (SEARO) and the Indian government.

The meeting focused on strategic actions to address key public health issues in Southeast Asia. It began with a video presentation on India’s health journey, highlighting the Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Mission, which aims for universal health coverage. Chandra emphasized the role of digital technologies in India’s healthcare, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. He highlighted the transition from the CoWIN platform to UWIN for tracking immunizations and creating digital certificates.

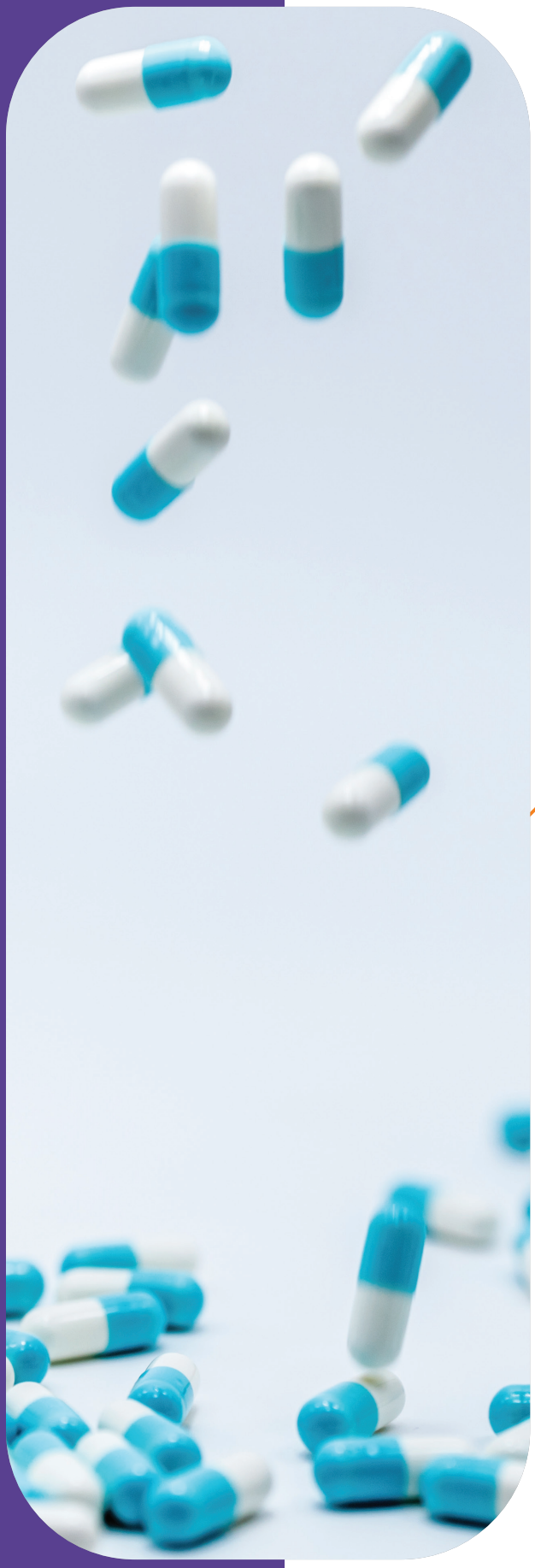
Chandra also introduced the BHISM cube from India’s Aarogya Maitri Project. This compact, modular medical aid cube, equipped with advanced technology, can treat up to 200 casualties and be deployed during emergencies.

Government cuts prices on 41 medicines for diabetes and heart ailments

The Indian government took a step towards improving public access to healthcare by reducing the prices of 41 essential medicines on 16th May 2024. This initiative aimed to make medications for common conditions like diabetes, heart disease, and liver ailments more affordable. The price reduction encompasses frequently used drugs such as antacids, multivitamins, and antibiotics.

This decision aligns with the goals set forth by the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) during its 143rd meeting, which emphasized ensuring the affordability of essential medicines. With a significant population battling diabetes, India is poised to see substantial benefits from this price cut. This action follows an earlier move by the Department of Pharmaceuticals in April, where they revised drug prices.

The government's effort to make essential medications more accessible is expected to improve public health outcomes, particularly for those battling chronic illnesses. By reducing the financial burden associated with necessary treatments, this initiative could lead to increased medication adherence and potentially better overall health for Indian citizens.



India's fight against Antimicrobial Resistance hindered by drug approval delays

A report by the Access to Medicine Foundation, a Netherlands-based independent non-profit organisation highlights a critical shortage of new antibiotics, driven by decreased interest from pharmaceutical companies due to profitability concerns. This lack of investment poses significant risks for low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), such as India, which already faces severe antibiotic resistance challenges.

The report notes that only a few companies are in the final stages of antibiotic development, and there is significant uncertainty about the registration and distribution of these new drugs in LMICs. For instance, GSK's antibiotic gepotidacin, trialed in India, lacks a clear plan for affordability and accessibility in the country. Similarly, Venatorx's promising antibiotic, intended for introduction through GARDP, has no established steps for availability in India.

WHO data reveals that only twelve new antibiotics were brought to market between 2017 and 2021, underscoring the slow development pace. Experts warn of a potential public health crisis in India if these drugs are not promptly registered and distributed.

Indian public health officials emphasize the urgency of the situation, acknowledging government efforts to promote responsible antibiotic use and enhance monitoring systems. However, they stress that delays in drug approval are a major barrier. The report calls for collaboration between pharmaceutical companies, policymakers, and international health organizations to expedite drug registration and ensure these vital medications are accessible and affordable, especially in vulnerable countries like India.

Pharma companies target Latin-American market for exports

On 25th May 2024, the Indian pharmaceutical industry announced its plans to expand exports to the Latin American market following successes in the US, Europe, and Africa. Latin America represents only 7% of India's $27.8 billion drug and pharmaceutical exports. S V Veeramani, Chairman of the Pharmaceuticals Export Promotion Council of India (Pharmexcil), highlighted that the US remains the largest importer of Indian pharmaceuticals and this trend is expected to continue.

Speaking at the 9th edition of 'Pharmac South 2024' in Chennai, Veeramani noted the significant potential in the Latin American market, despite its low import volume from India. He projected that India's global drug and pharmaceutical exports would increase by 10% in FY25, surpassing the $30 billion mark. In contrast to the $10 billion worth of exports to North America, exports to Latin America stood at just $2 billion.

J Jayaseelan, Chairman of the Indian Drug Manufacturers' Association for Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, and Kerala, emphasized the need for establishing the National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPER) in Tamil Nadu to support the industry's growth. The event underscored the Indian pharmaceutical sector's strategic focus on expanding its global footprint, particularly in untapped regions like Latin America.

India addresses pharma pricing control with Australia

On 5th May 2024, India and Australia held a meeting to discuss trade issues under their Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA). Both sides acknowledged the smooth implementation of the agreement but also raised concerns.

India brought up the issue of pharmaceutical pricing control in Australia, particularly for generic medicines. Additionally, they requested easier market access for Indian exports like okra, pomegranate, and cottage cheese. Australia, on the other hand, is interested in making progress on whisky and wine exports to India. The meeting also addressed challenges in other sectors. India requested facilitation for cross-border e-payments and recognition of Indian professionals like nurses and dentists in Australia.

Despite a recent decline in bilateral trade, both sides acknowledged the potential for growth. Discussions were held between chief negotiators to review progress on an even more comprehensive trade agreement (CECA). The meeting aimed to strengthen trade ties and explore opportunities for collaboration in areas like trade facilitation, investment promotion, and technology.

WHO and THSTI launched an e-learning course for pharmacists on medicine use

The World Health Organization (WHO) India Country Office, along with Indian government bodies, launched an e-learning course on rational medicine use for pharmacists on 3rd May 2024. This initiative promotes appropriate medication use, a key factor in achieving universal health coverage.

WHO defines rational use of medicine (RUM) as patients receiving the right medication for their condition, at the correct dosage, for a sufficient timeframe, and at an affordable cost. The Indian government's National Health Policy emphasizes the importance of RUM and drug safety (pharmacovigilance).

The WHO recommends various strategies for promoting RUM, including policies on drug use, clinical practice guidelines based on evidence, a list of essential medicines, public education about medications, and appropriate regulations with enforcement. The online course offers unique features such as an exit assessment with certification and an interactive forum for ongoing discussions between participants and experts.

This course aims to deepen understanding and encourage adherence to best practices for medication use within the healthcare system. Pharmacists play a critical role in ensuring patients receive the right medications at the optimal dosage and duration and at an affordable cost.

The Pharmacy Council of India pledged its support to enhance RUM through educational programs and policies. The course covers RUM fundamentals, pharmacy regulations, and India's drug regulatory system. This initiative, led by distinguished experts, empowers pharmacists to ensure patients receive the right medication for optimal outcomes.

CDSCO-WHO-BRIC THSTI launches webinar series for Indian regulators

A new virtual initiative, the CDSCO-WHO-BRIC THSTI Regulatory Webinar Series, was launched on 1st May 2024. This program aims to improve the capabilities of drug regulators in India, at both the central and state levels. The series is a collaborative effort between several organizations: the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), the World Health Organization's India office (WHO), the Biotechnology Research Innovation Council (BRIC), and the Translational Health Science and Technology Institute (THSTI).

Dr. Rajeev Singh Raghuvanshi, the Drugs Controller General of India, emphasized that the program focuses on training and implementing WHO guidelines for National Regulatory Authorities (NRAs). This online series will help build the capacity of Indian regulators. Dr Rubina Bose, Deputy Drugs Controller of India, explained that the program offers a flexible curriculum. It covers four key areas related to drug regulation: good regulatory practices, good review practices, quality management systems for inspectors, and implementing WHO quality management systems.

Participants discussed enhancing cooperation in vaccination efforts, managing non-communicable diseases, preparing health systems for emergencies, post-pandemic recovery, responding to the climate crisis, and addressing mental health issues. They also stressed decentralizing health issues to provincial and district levels to improve pandemic preparedness and health security.

India faces delay for Novo Nordisk's 'Wegovy' weight-loss drug

Novo Nordisk's weight-loss drug 'Wegovy' was not expected to enter the market this year. Wegovy, approved by the US FDA in June 2021, mimics the GLP-1 hormone to create a feeling of fullness, aiding weight loss for those with obesity or overweight. Karsten Munk Knudsen, CFO and EVP of Novo Nordisk confirmed the delay, highlighting the company's cautious strategy in balancing market expansion with supply commitments.

Wegovy had been quickly adopted in the US and other countries, including Denmark, Norway, Germany, the UK, Iceland, Switzerland, UAE, and Japan. Despite this, demand continued to exceed supply, challenging the company's ability to fulfill prescriptions in established markets like the US. Novo Nordisk had increased production, with new weekly US patient enrollments surpassing 25,000 as of December 2023, but the surge in demand strained manufacturing capacity.

Knudsen emphasized that Novo Nordisk was maximizing production by running manufacturing lines continuously and was cautious about launching in new markets to avoid jeopardizing patient continuity. He also acknowledged the significant unmet needs in India for diabetes and obesity management, describing the situation as substantial.

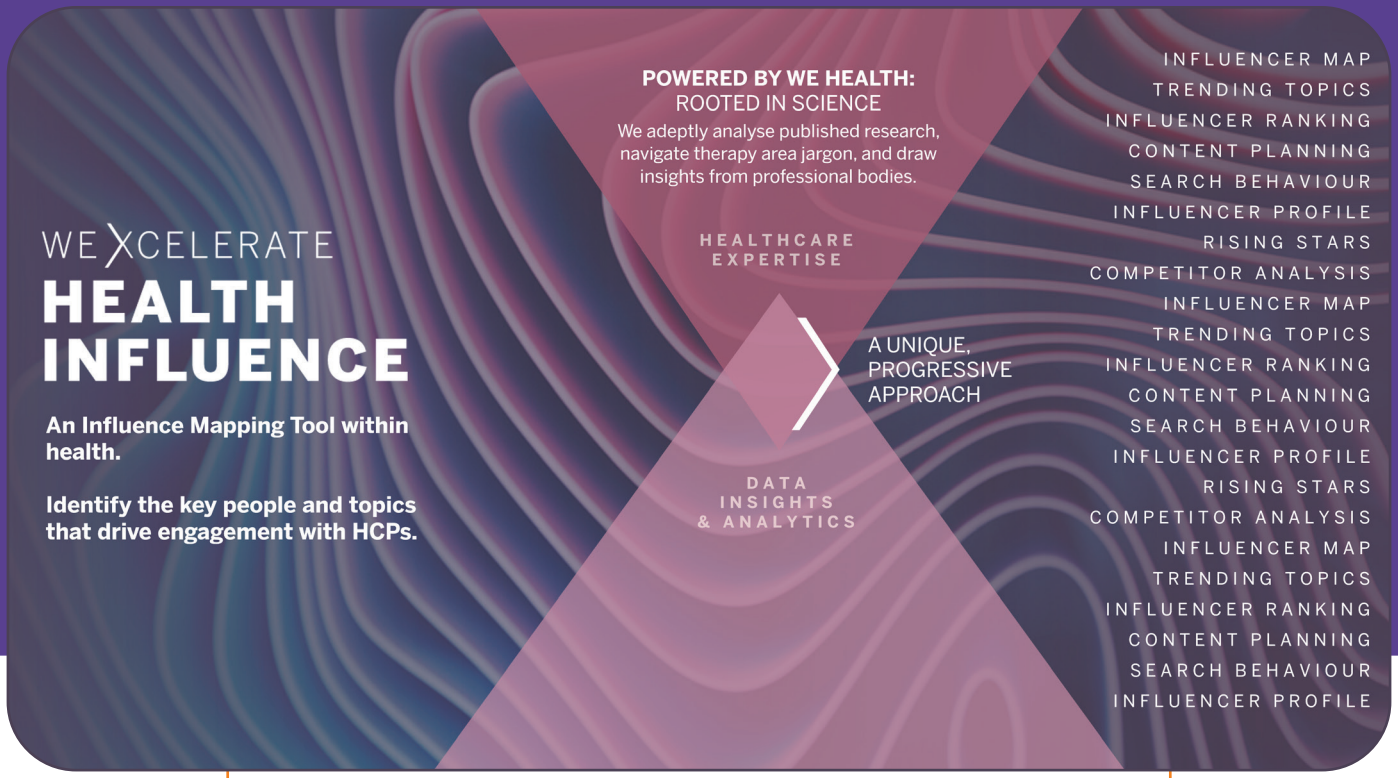
Obesity rates in India had reached "epidemic proportions," with a March 2024 study in BMC Endocrine Disorders reporting that 6.4% of women and 4% of men aged 15-49 years were classified as obese. On March 8, Novo Nordisk announced FDA approval for a label expansion of Wegovy to reduce major adverse cardiovascular events (MACE) risks in adults with overweight or obesity and established cardiovascular disease (CVD), further highlighting its cardiovascular health benefits.

HIGHLIGHT

WE Communications launches WE Xcelerate Health Influence

Today, healthcare professionals (HCPs) are increasingly using online platforms to engage with their clinical communities. In this scenario, it is critical to understand the opinion leaders, influencers and content that have maximum impact. To address this need, WE Communications has introduced WE Xcelerate Health Influence, a new product, aimed at measuring health influence within the online landscape. This innovative tool utilizes WE's blend of health sector knowledge and data analytics expertise to identify pivotal individuals and content themes, which can provide strategic guidance for engaging with healthcare partners effectively through online channels.

Leveraging a scientific approach powered by data, WE Xcelerate offers insights and recommendations for implementing strategies and working with key HCPs. Users can also use the tool to strengthen and enhance search engine options. In addition, it helps to capture the intricacies of conversations surrounding a product or therapy area. WE Xcelerate enables users to identify emerging, key influencers and track trending topics, facilitating informed strategic decisions.



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