

Topic: Not For Sale

One of the major news stories of the first week of 2017 was regarding **France adopting the opt-out system when it comes to organ donations**. This is essentially a “**presumed consent**” system where it is assumed that a **deceased person has agreed to donate their organs** unless they have added their name to a **national “refusal register”**. The move was met with applause from many quarters. The opt-out system has worked wonders in many other countries like **Spain and Chile**. Commentators expect France’s transition to an opt-out system to increase organ donation rates massively.

### **The importance of healthcare and Government health spending**

One must not forget that such a transition is radical and its success is heavily reliant on the concerned country’s health scene. France, for example, boasts of a **universal healthcare system hailed by the World Health Organization (WHO) as “close to the best overall”** in the world. Government funded agencies bear nearly **77% of health expenditure** of French citizens. Spain, similarly, invests heavily in healthcare. Despite decreasing rates of health spending in recent years, the Spanish healthcare system is considered among the best in the world by the WHO. It is important to note that the success of the opt-out system can only be ensured when it is accompanied by **high numbers of medical facilities, personnel and awareness**. The reason why the opt-out system worked for Spain and Chile – and will most likely succeeds in France too – is because these countries already invested heavily in healthcare. They ensured a system of progressive healthcare for all citizens and had high levels of health spending as a percentage of their national GDP.

### **Organ donation in India**

A **huge gap** persists between **demand and supply of organs** in India. India has a **donation rate of 0.5 per million** – one of the **lowest in the world**. In contrast, **Spain** has a donation rate of **36 per million** inhabitants while numbers for Germany and the United States are 11 and 26. According to studies, around **1.6 lakh patients are waiting for organs in India** while a mere **12,000 donors are available**. The Ministry of Health has estimated that the annual requirement for kidneys could range between **1-2 lakh with a mere 5,000 transplants** occurring in reality. The state and central governments have taken many steps to increase the rates of organ donation in India. For example, **in 2012 the Delhi Government launched an online portal** for registration of organ donors. The Indian Medical Association recently announced several campaigns to increase awareness about organ donations. The primary legislation related to organ donation and transplantation in India, **Transplantation of Human Organs Act, was passed in 1994** and is aimed at regulation of removal, storage and transplantation of human organs for therapeutic purposes and for prevention of commercial dealings in human organs, yet **the heinous commercial trade** goes on, as was highlighted by **the case of the Apollo Hospital in New Delhi**, one of the best hospitals in India. Doctors there admitted that they were duped into removed kidneys for transplant which ended up being **sold for cash** to organ traffickers. The doctors were deceived by fake documents which purported to show that the organ donors were undergoing surgery to help sick relatives. In fact, the organ was removed so that the donor could sell it for cash.

India can solve its problems regarding organ donation **only by increasing health spending**. If the government were to increase government spending on healthcare – like in the West – it would improve health conditions of millions of Indians. Without improving its healthcare scenario, India cannot hope to make meaningful strides towards ensuring that its organ donation needs are met.

### **Healthcare in India**

India's **healthcare system remains backwards and insufficient**, with private providers being the dominant force and no solid program for a universal healthcare system in sight. Spending on health care increased from about **3.5% to 5% in the period between 1988 and 2002**. In countries like the **United States and the United Kingdom**, healthcare accounts for more than **18% of the GDP**. Meanwhile, government spending on healthcare has hovered around 20–25% during the past two decades. Health spending as a proportion of total government recurrent spending fell from 4.5% in 1985–86 to 3.3% in 2004–05. It is currently hovering around 5% and is still as insufficient as ever. Moreover, healthcare in India is severely divided along the lines of income and urbanization.

### **The Modi Government's strides in healthcare**

The Modi Government has repeatedly professed that it is serious about providing universal healthcare – healthcare for all Indians. **On 22 December 2016, the Prime Minister said the country was moving towards the “best healthcare system” in the world** and stressed the importance of providing quality and affordable healthcare to all Indians, especially the poor. There were high hopes of the Government finally focusing on improving the health sector. However, the **government has continuously slashed the health budget**. Because India only **spends 1% of its current GDP on healthcare**, further budget cuts in this sector can lead to some grave repercussions.

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<http://www.organindia.org/laws-made-easy/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/jan/02/france-organ-donation-law>

<http://blogs.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/talkingturkey/organ-donation-india-should-follow-france-and-switch-to-a-presumed-consent-system/>