

The private health sector in India

<https://www.bmj.com/content/331/7526/1157>

BMJ 2005; 331 doi: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.331.7526.1157> (Published 17 November 2005)

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The private health sector in India is burgeoning, but at the cost of public health care

Foreigners in increasing numbers are now coming to India for private health care. They come from the Middle East, Africa, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, for complex paediatric cardiac surgery or liver transplants—procedures that are not done in their home countries. They also come from the United Kingdom, Europe, and North America for quick, efficient, and cheap coronary bypasses or orthopaedic procedures. A shoulder operation in the UK would cost £10 000 (\$17 460; €14 560) done privately or entail several months' wait under the NHS. In India, the same operation can be done for £1700 and within 10 days of a first email contact.¹

The recent remarkable growth of the private health sector in India has come at a time when public spending on health care at 0.9% of gross domestic product (GDP) is among the lowest in the world and ahead of only five countries—Burundi, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sudan, and Cambodia. This proportion has fallen from an already low 1.3% of GDP in 1991 when the neoliberal economic reforms began.²

Yet India ranks among the top 20 of the world's countries in its private spending, at 4.2% of GDP. Employers pay for 9% of spending on private care, health insurance ...