

Health ministry launches department of health research

A new Department of Health Research to boost biomedical research was launched by the health ministry Friday and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) was brought under its purview.

Making the announcement, union Health Minister Anbumani Ramadoss said that the new department would be autonomous and play a major role in research and guiding the government in coming out with health policies.

The department will have its own secretary, deputy secretary and separate budget, he said at a function to commemorate ICMR's foundation day.

'It will focus on developing drugs, doing biomedical research and address all kinds of problems that the ICMR laboratories are facing at this time,' the minister said.

'The department will tie up with international universities, research agencies and be in charge of setting up public health schools. The budget will be at least five times more than what ICMR is currently getting,' he said.

ICMR director general N.K. Ganguly said that ICMR was working in this direction since 1911, but the challenges had grown and there was need for a separate department.

'The main thrust of the department will be to promote research, build capacity and infrastructure of the existing laboratories and create more manpower in the field of research,' he said.

'We should produce 10 times more PhDs every year,' he said.

The department would also start courses on translational medicine, said Ramadoss, as the 21st century calls for detecting a disease before the symptoms emerge.

Elaborating on the role of ICMR in research and the creation of new departments, Ramadoss said the need to reorganise ICMR on the pattern of other agencies was well appreciated. The ICMR will continue to function as earlier, but will now be part of the new Department of Health Research.

'The government of India took note of the recommendations made by the Performance Appraisal Board of the ICMR, which Hon'ble Prof. Kasturirangan chaired and set into motion a process to create a Department of Health Research,' Ramadoss said.

'I am happy to inform you that the president of India has given assent to the proposal and the Department of Health Research has been created. This fulfils a long-standing demand of the medical research community in the country.'

Special invitee on the occasion, Elias A. Zerhouni, director of the US' National Institute of Health, said: 'I hope the new department will address the future challenges in disease prevention both in India and abroad.'

'We have nine agreements either finalised or on the pipeline with India. We are looking forward to more collaboration with the country to fight health problems.'

'The department should do a lot of research and come out with solutions for people in the subcontinent or any where else,' Zerhouni said.

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