

Affordable drug stores to be set up across the country

Anonna Dutt

■ letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: The government's flagship programme promoting the use of generic drugs, Jan Aushadhi, will reach all the districts in India by mid-August.

The generic drug stores have already opened in 612 of the 717 district in India under the Pradhan Mantri Bharatiya Jan Aushadhi Pariyojna (PMBJP).

"We had aimed to reach all districts in India by the end of this year, but we will be able to do it in August itself. In the last two years, the programme has grown exponentially," said Sachin Singh, chief executive officer of Bureau of Pharma Public Sector Undertakings (BPPI) of India, the agency which runs the programme.

The stores that sell more than 900 medicine and 150 surgical items at discounted prices, sometimes as cheap as 20 to 30% of the market rate has saved people ₹450 crore in the last two years, according to calculations by BPPI.

The stores are opened as a franchise of the government brand and the medicines are centrally supplied.

The number of Jan Aushadhi stores has increased from 80 in 2014 to 3,872 stores in July, 2018, with the expansion picking up pace in the last two years.

In 2017, the number of stores went up 1,080 from just 269 in the previous year.

"It is actually a very good initiative by the government for bringing down the cost of treatment. Almost 60% of out-of-pocket expenditure is on medicines. However, we see longer queues outside Amrit stores run by HLL than the government-run Jan Aushadhi stores. This can be changed only when there is a wider range of medicines available in the stores, including some branded drugs. Apart from that the government has to ensure that the quality of the drugs and take action against erring manufacturers openly in public. This will increase the faith of the people in the drugs," said Dr AK Rai, former medical superintendent of Safdarjung hospital.

The growth is reflected in the turnovers too.