Chapter 2 discusses 'health' as an important issue for people. There are both public and private aspects of health provisioning. Healthcare in India is not available to all, though the Constitution supports a view that the right to health is an aspect of our fundamental rights. Through this chapter, you will begin to visualize the ideal or desired role of government, and the meanings behind its structures. Some ways in which the situation of health services can be changed in India are also explained. So, go through Class 7 Social Science Civics Chapter 2 – Role of the Government in Health" to understand these topics in detail.

What is health?

Health means our ability to remain free of illness and injuries. Apart from disease, there are other factors that affect our health such as dullness, inactiveness, anxiety or being scared for long stretches of time.

Healthcare in India

To prevent and treat illnesses, we need appropriate

healthcare facilities such as health centres, hospitals, laboratories for testing, ambulance services, blood banks, etc. These facilities can provide the care and services that a patient needs. To run such facilities we need health workers, nurses, qualified doctors and other health professionals who can advice, diagnose and treat illnesses. We also need medicines and equipment that are necessary for treating patients.

India has a large number of doctors, clinics and hospitals. **Public Healthcare System** is a system of hospitals and health centres run by the government. It has the ability to look after the health of a large section of its population scattered over hundreds of thousands of villages. However, even after having public healthcare systems the government is not able to provide proper healthcare facilities to people.
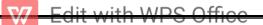
Public and Private Health Care Services

The health care facilities are divided into 2 categories:

1. Public Health Services
2. Private Health Facilities

Public Health Services

The public health service is a chain of health centres and hospitals run by the government. They are linked together so that they cover both rural and urban areas.

1. At the village level, there are **health centres** where there is a nurse and a village health worker. They are trained in dealing with common illnesses and work

under the supervision of doctors at the Primary Health Centre (PHC). Such a centre covers many villages in a rural area.

2. At the district level, there is a **District Hospital** that supervises all the health centres.
3. Large cities have many **government hospitals** and also specialised government hospitals.

The **health service is called 'public'** for many reasons as mentioned below:

1. The government has established hospitals and health centres for everyone.
2. The medical facilities are provided at a low cost so that the poor can also seek treatment.

The function of Public health service is to take action to prevent the spread of diseases such as TB, malaria, jaundice, cholera, diarrhea, chikungunya, etc.

The government must safeguard the Right to Life of every person. According to our Constitution, it is the primary duty of the government to ensure the welfare of the people and provide health care facilities to all.

Private Health Facilities

There is a wide range of private health facilities that exist in our country. There are hospitals

and nursing homes that are privately owned. Private health facilities are not owned or controlled by the government. Patients have to pay a lot of money for every service that they use.

Healthcare and equality: Is adequate healthcare available to all?

In India, private services are increasing fast but public services are the same. There is no increase in the public service. So, people have access to mainly private services. The cost of private services is very high. Some private services encourage incorrect practices to earn more money.

For a middle-class family, medical expenses cause hardship. For the poor, every illness in the family is a cause of great anxiety and distress. The expenses on illness make their situation even worse.
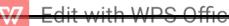
What can be done?

It is the responsibility of the government to provide quality healthcare services to all its citizens, especially the poor and the disadvantaged. It is important to work on public health facilities as well as on basic amenities in order to improve the health situation of our people. Let us take two examples to understand this in a better way.

1) The Kerala experience

In 1996, the Kerala government allocated 40% of the total Kerala budget to the panchayats. This made it possible for a village to make sure that proper planning was done for water, food, women's development and education. Health centres were also improved.

2) The Costa Rican approach

Costa Rica is considered to be one of the healthiest countries in Central America. Several years ago, Costa
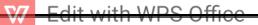
Rica took a decision not to have an army. This helped the Costa Rican government to spend the money that the army would have used, on health, education and other basic needs of the people. The Costa Rican government provides basic services and amenities to all Costa Ricans.

1. In this chapter you have read that health is a wider concept that illness. Look at this quote from the constitution and explain the terms 'living standard' and 'public health' in your own words.

2. What are the different ways through which the government can take steps to provide healthcare for all? Discuss.

3. What differences do you find between private and public health services in your area? Use the following table to compare and contrast these.

Facility	Affordability	Availability	Quality
Private			
Public			

4.   Improvement in water and sanitation can control many diseases. Explain with the help of examples.