<u>Covid-19 Insights: Analysis from Ethics, Human Rights and Law Perspectives</u>

INTERNET FREEDOM FOUNDATION

RETHINK AADHAAR

FMES Forum for Medical Ethics Society

Swathanthra Malayalam Computing

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Civil Society Statement of Concern – Free Vaccines for All Without Tech Barriers | **Forum for Medical Ethics Society, Internet Freedom Foundation, Rethink Aadhaar Campaign, Swathanthra Malayalam Computing**

To,

Dr. Harshvardhan,
Hon'ble Minister for Health
and Family Welfare,
Government of India,
New Delhi

Mr. Rajeev Bhushan,
Secretary,
Ministry for Health and
Family Welfare,
Government of India,
New Delhi

Mr. PK Mishra,
Secretary,
Prime Minister's Office,
Government of India,
New Delhi

Respected Sir,

We hope you are safe in these trying times. As India faces a grave health emergency, digital barriers, and Aadhaar, are increasing people's pain and distress. We are a group of human rights, digital rights and public health organisations, and are writing to you with a statement of concern regarding access to healthcare and the intervention of technology during the present health crisis. The **<u>full statement</u>** as endorsed by **1,639 individuals and 13 organisations** is attached for your perusal.

1.   **Aadhaar must go. It increases the risk of transmission, and more importantly, is a massive source of exclusion.**

Across the country, hospitals, suppliers & state governments are mandating Aadhaar for access to diagnostics, medicines, oxygen and the vaccine. This is a grave violation of the right to life, and health. **Aadhaar cannot be made a prerequisite for access to healthcare, vaccines or any other form of care.**

- Across multiple states **and** **cities,** the Aadhaar card of the patient and attendant are being mandated to hand over oxygen cylinders.
- In **Maharashtra**, it is mandatory to show Aadhaar card, the results of a positive test and a doctor's prescription for citizens to purchase remdesivir and tocilizumab.
- In Gujarat, **Public Distribution Shop owners** are asking to halt biometric authentication as it increases the risk of transmission.

We have options. The government of Chhattisgarh has announced it will develop its own mechanism for vaccination, and has **prioritised vaccines for Antodaya card holders for 18-45**, who will not need to register on the CoWIN App or provide their mobile numbers. **We hope other leaders like you will follow suit to ensure the vaccines are accessible to all.**

The Supreme Court has clarified in its Order dated April 30, 2021, on suo moto hearings on the COVID-19 crisis, that states must ensure there are no identity requirements for admission to hospitals.

2.   **Ensure Vaccines for all, through walk-in access, and without it being linked online registration or mobile phone ownership**

Phase III of the National Vaccination Strategy has been designed to create exclusions and barriers. Those between 18-45 can only register online, state governments and private hospitals have to pay for and procur the vaccines, and there are no mechanisms for regulating the price charged by private hospitals. **If the mode of accessing the vaccine are not made more equitable, lakhs of people will not be able to access the vaccine. This is a threat to life, dignity and to all of us.**

3.   **We cannot let the government or private parties exploit our health data**

The pandemic is being used as an excuse for officials to develop the National Digital Health ID, and to test out Aadhaar linked facial recognition. India would be the only country to do this. Rethink Aadhaar and other civil society groups have **strongly opposed** any moves of this nature. **It is deeply unethical to test out new technology during a pandemic. Data collected during vaccination cannot be re-used for any other purpose without informed consent and public consultations, and in the absence of a data protection law.**

We are writing to you as civil society groups, and as concerned citizens, as you have the power to make a difference. We hope that you are able to address these concerns,

With regards,

Forum for Medical Ethics Society
Internet Freedom Foundation
Rethink Aadhaar Campaign
Swathanthra Malayalam Computing