

Gut Microbiota and Probiotic Science Foundation organises 16th India Probiotic Symposium in New Delhi

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The Gut Microbiota and Probiotic Science Foundation organised the 16th India Probiotic Symposium on “*Gut Microbiome and Probiotics: Impact from Cradle to Centenarians*” in New Delhi on March 27–28, 2026.

Delivering the Chief Guest address, Shri Rajiv Gauba, Member, NITI Aayog underscored the critical role of the gut microbiome in immunity, metabolism and preventive healthcare.

Shri Gauba expressed concern over the rapid shift in dietary habits in India, noting that urbanisation, changing lifestyles and the increasing consumption of ultra-processed and refined foods often driven by social media and quick commerce platforms are distancing people from traditional, nutritionally rich diets. He cautioned that these trends could have serious long-term consequences for gut health highlighting that an estimated 56.4% of India’s disease burden is attributable to unhealthy or imbalanced diets. He further warned that if neglected, “micro-organisms could create macro consequences.”

Situating gut health within a wider development context, Shri Gauba described healthcare as the most critical sector for both individual well-being and economic growth. He stated that India’s demographic dividend can only be realised with a healthy workforce and timely preparation for active and healthy ageing as the elderly share of the population rises. He emphasised that investment in health is an investment in Viksit Bharat and cited initiatives such as Ayushman Bharat, PM-JAY, PM Bharatiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana and Ayushman Arogya Mandirs have significantly strengthened primary healthcare and financial protection. He pointed out that out-of-pocket health expenditure has declined from 62.6% to 39.4% between FY15 and FY22, resulting in savings of over ₹1.25 lakh crore for households.

At the same time, Shri Gauba acknowledged persistent challenges related to access, equity, affordability, quality, patient safety and shortages of skilled healthcare professionals. He emphasised that access to healthcare services continues to be influenced by socio-economic factors. Urging healthcare professionals to play a proactive role, he called for increased prescription of affordable generic medicines and greater use of digital health tools, telemedicine, data analytics and AI to expand specialist care to underserved communities and act as advocates for those lacking access to quality medical services.

Addressing the evolving field of probiotics, Shri Gauba noted that microbiome science has progressed from descriptive studies to mechanistic and translational research. He highlighted emerging frontiers such as next-generation microbiome-based therapeutics, synthetic biology and CRISPR-enabled engineering of probiotic strains with targeted anti-inflammatory and metabolic functions for precision medicine. However, he cautioned against the growing spread of misinformation and misleading advertisements in

the probiotics and supplements market, urging clinicians and researchers to use their credibility and media reach to disseminate accurate information, promote healthy dietary habits and champion preventive lifestyles that reduce the need for expensive diagnostics and procedures.

Highlighting India's rich heritage of fermented foods and traditional dietary practices, Shri Gauba stated that the country is uniquely positioned to lead the global probiotic movement by combining traditional knowledge with genomic and microbiome research to develop clinically validated probiotics. He underlined the vast public health potential of probiotics to reduce infectious and chronic disease burdens, improve nutrition and strengthen population immunity. He also stressed that robust collaboration between academia, industry and regulators is essential to translate scientific advances into safe, effective and accessible products.

Lauding the participation of young researchers and innovators, Shri Gauba encouraged them to adopt multidisciplinary and evidence-based approaches to address complex health challenges. He expressed confidence that the symposium would catalyse new collaborations and reinforce India's leadership in the field of microbiome and probiotic science.

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