

## Ziqitza Healthcare Limited: Scaling Emergency Medical Services across India

### Introduction

Sweta Mengal, CEO of *Dial 1298 for Ambulance*, sat at her desk in anticipation. She had just received word that her home state of Rajasthan had awarded 1298, the lowest-cost bidder, a three-year contract to manage over 300 ambulances in the state, effectively quadrupling the number of ambulances operated by 1298 and doubling the population served to up to 100 million.<sup>1</sup> As 1298's first statewide government contract, this would mark a new chapter in the company's history as it expanded across India. After just a few short years of acting as the CEO, Sweta was seeing progress toward the original founders' mission to provide world-class ambulance service for all of India's population, regardless of socioeconomic status.

At the same time, Sweta was anxious about the challenges presented in the Rajasthan contract. 1298 would have to maintain its current quality level while acclimating to the ambulance infrastructure provided by the Rajasthan government and would have to find talented, socially-minded staff (the core of the current organization) in an extremely short time frame. Sweta was also apprehensive about working with the government, which had very little experience partnering with private medical services across India. Would the Rajasthan government dilute 1298's operations and the brand she had worked so hard to build? In all, were government partnerships the best way for 1298 to scale its business?

### Company Overview

Ziqitza Healthcare Limited (ZHL) and 1298, ZHL's branded ambulance service, were founded in 2002 with the mission of providing emergency medical services to all Indian citizens, regardless of their ability to pay. Derived from the Sanskrit words *chikitsa*, meaning "medical treatment," and *zigyasa*, meaning "quest for knowledge," Ziqitza is the brainchild of Naresh Jain, Manish Sacheti, Ravi Krishna, and Shaffi Mather, the latter of whom recognized the need for quality EMS services when his mother had a health emergency and could not obtain transport other than the household car.<sup>2</sup>

Due to the high prevalence of accidents, cardiac arrests, and other problems requiring emergency ambulance care in urban areas, 1298, with an initial investment of \$1.5 million from the Acumen Fund, started operations in Mumbai in 2002 and in Kerala soon afterward. It is currently contemplating expanding to other cities in India.



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