

PRESS RELEASE

A group of health professionals and citizen movement organizations has submitted a **joint statement** to **Mr. Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission, Government of India**, today on Infant and Young Child Feeding, asking him to recognize “breastfeeding” as a core intervention for ensuring the survival and optimal development of infants and incorporate it in the 11th plan.

Worried over the high level of infant mortality and neonatal death rates in India, the representatives sought adequate measures that could protect infants and young children from further deaths and ensure proper development for those who survived. The latest provisional report of NFHS-3 and UNICEF’s recent report on The State of the World’s Children 2007 show high prevalence of IMR in India and varying in different states. In few states, however, the IMR rate has been increased during last 2 decades and recent years. Today overwhelming evidence exists that universally initiating breastfeeding within one hour of birth, exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months, and continued breastfeeding with adequate and appropriate complementary feeding for at least two years, can rapidly reduce infant mortality by more than 43%. Breastfeeding has also been shown to lead to optimal brain development, increasing IQ levels.

Breastfeeding has also been designated as a key strategy for poverty reduction. The Joint Statement calls for recognizing optimal infant and young child feeding in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and incorporate 0-6 months for exclusive breastfeeding in all programmes to ensure infants’ basic right to food.

Prepared by a coalition of sixteen health professional and citizen movement organizations, the Joint Statement also asks the planning commission to declare “breastfeeding education” as a basic service equal to immunization in both health and nutrition sectors. Dr. Arun Gupta, National Coordinator, Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India, informed that this calls for five major actions:

- ensure adequate budget for national and state plans;

- create a commission on infant nutrition for specific tasks and coordination for optimizing infant nutrition;
- establish accountability and mechanisms on infant nutrition in MOH and MWCD;
- provide legislation support to all women for adequate healthcare support and
- assure six months maternity leave to ensure initiation of breastfeeding within one hour of birth, exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months

Shri Montek Singh Ahluwalia showed keen interest in the data related particularly the effect of initiation of breastfeeding within the first hour on neonatal and infant mortality rates. He also expressed concern over IBFAN-Asia Pacific's assessment of breastfeeding practices, policies and programmes in 8 South Asian countries. He was extremely concerned that India stood 6th in rank, far lower than other countries in the Asian subcontinent, except for Afghanistan.

Acknowledging that IYCF , especially breastfeeding, is the most important task in front of the government today, Sh. Ahluwalia requested BPNI to create an organizational chart of an institution that could centre-stage breastfeeding. Existing organisations could be either abolished or restructured to create this new and effective body.

We also call upon the supreme court to take suo moto cognizance of national loss of infants 3000 a day, much of those could be save through breastfeeding.

BPNI and national partners

Organisations

1. All India Drug Action Network (AIDAN)
2. Association for Consumer's Action on Safety and Health (ACASH)
3. Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI)
4. Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS)
5. Christian Medical Association of India (CMAI)
6. Federation of Obstetric and Gynaecological Societies of India (FOGSI)
7. Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP)
8. Indian Association of Preventive and Social Medicine (IAPSM)
9. Indian Medical Association (IMA)
10. Indian Public Health Association (IPHA)
11. Jan Swasthya Abhiyan (JSA)
12. National Neonatology Forum (NNF)
13. Navdanya
14. Right to Food Campaign
15. Samayak Foundation
16. Trained Nurses' Association of India (TNAI)

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