

# How India is shaping the future by investing in caregiver wellbeing

Benefits abound when governments prioritise parents and caregivers

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**Children are like wet clay: whatever touches them makes an impression. The early phases of a child's life are a particularly sensitive time, leaving a lasting impact that reaches far beyond childhood. Especially critical are the child's first 1,000 days, the period from conception to 2 years of age, when the brain develops most rapidly. The basic blueprint of the brain is constructed through an ongoing process that begins before birth and is influenced by a pregnant woman's health, her stress levels, her nutrition and the intrauterine environment.**

Caregivers – predominantly mothers, but also fathers, grandparents and other family members – provide the love and nurturing care that are essential for a child's physical, cognitive and emotional development. Yet many of the immense responsibilities that caregivers shoulder often go unrecognised and undervalued.

The health and wellbeing of caregivers is a critical influence on the health of our children and, by extension, the health and wellbeing of our nation. By investing in caregiver wellbeing, we can transform

India's socioeconomic future. And, notwithstanding the challenges that come with being a vast and diverse country, we are making significant strides in this direction.

**“By investing in caregiver wellbeing, we can transform India's socioeconomic future.”**

## **Ambitious programmes on maternal and child health in India**

Acknowledging the challenges and prioritising the wellbeing of caregivers are key components of early childhood development. If a pregnant woman or a new mother suffers from anaemia, for example, it can interfere with her ability to care for herself and her child, and harm the child's nutrition.

In recent years, the Government of India under the determined leadership of Hon. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji has launched a number of major programmes to invest in caregivers:



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- We recognise the need to start even before conception. The *POSHAN Abhiyaan*, introduced by Hon. Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji in 2018, focuses on nourishment not only for young children, lactating mothers and pregnant women, but for all women of reproductive age.
- All pregnant women in India are entitled to comprehensive, high-quality antenatal care free of charge, through the ambitious *Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan* programme, which has reached over 40 million women so far.
- The *Surakshit Matritva Aashwasan* programme aims to end preventable maternal and newborn deaths through over 25,000 delivery points for healthcare services across the country.
- To encourage women to make use of healthcare services, a cash incentive scheme called *Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana* makes payments of INR 5,000 (around USD 60) to first-time mothers in three instalments: when they register their pregnancy with a health provider; when they have an antenatal checkup; and when they register their child's birth and have their first round of vaccinations.
- The *Janani Suraksha Yojana*, a conditional cash transfer scheme, provides a further incentive for women to give birth in a healthcare institution rather than at home. Such cash payments also help compensate mothers for their lost wages and cover incidental expenses, enabling them to take more rest and afford better nutrition before and after childbirth.
- Complementing all of these programmes is *Ayushman Bharat*, the government's flagship "healthcare for all" scheme, which is creating a network of centres to deliver primary healthcare services to all, including maternal and child health services. The programme offers an insurance cover of INR 500,000 (around USD 6,000) per year per family.
- For women in employment, the Maternity Benefit Amendment Act 2017 provides maternity leave of up to 26 weeks. Workplaces with more than 50 employees must also provide creche facilities and allow mothers to visit their infant in the creche at least four times during the working day.

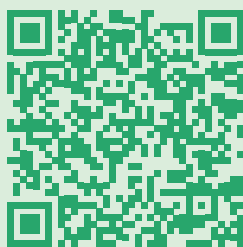
India's commitment under Hon. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji's passionate inclination to support caregivers – from antenatal care to financial incentives for institutional births, to support for new working mothers – is visible in the holistic life-cycle approach of various programmes, policies and services.

**“We could potentially generate an economic impact worth over a billion dollars.”**

### **Paalan 1000: Using technology to help caregivers**

With a change in family structures towards nuclear families, caregivers miss the tips and guidance that were easily available in joint families. In August 2022, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare under the dynamic guidance of Hon. Minister Dr Mansukh Mandaviya ji launched the Paalan 1000 parenting app and nationwide campaign, which addresses stress management for caregivers and supports them in providing responsive and loving care.

Paalan 1000 is based around six core themes: maximise love; talk and engage; explore through movement and play; read and discuss stories; mother's engagement with the child while breastfeeding; and managing stress and staying calm. We also published a booklet, *Journey of the First 1000 Days*, in Hindi and English (Government of India Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2018).



← Scan the QR code to download the Paalan 1000 App

### **Shaping India's future with families at the heart**

Caregiver wellbeing needs to be an integral part of investments in early childhood development – one of the most cost-efficient and powerful strategies to achieve physical, cognitive, linguistic, sensory, social and emotional development of the child. It is also an economic imperative. Research by Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman estimates that a range of early childhood interventions generates around USD 7 to USD 10 in societal benefits for every dollar invested (Heckman, 2012). For programmes aimed at the most disadvantaged children, the return on investment can be as high as 17% (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2017). Assuming a USD 10 return on every additional dollar invested in each of these children, we could potentially generate an economic impact worth over a billion dollars.

We have the right policies in place, as well as decisive programmes to accelerate improvements in maternal and child health. With early childhood development and caregiver wellbeing a national priority, we are poised to fulfil our ambition that all our families survive and thrive.

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↑ Dr Bharati Pravin Pawar speaking at the Paalan 1000 launch event in India, August 2022

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