

Strengthening Nutrition Interventions in ANC: The Experience from West Bengal, India

Rationale:

Systematic reviews and meta-analyses have shown higher risk of preterm and low birth weight babies born to underweight women. The intervention thus aimed to enhance the comprehensive ante natal care services in the state of West Bengal by introducing mandatory Body Mass Index (BMI) assessments for pregnant women during their visits to sub health centres or Village Health and Nutrition Days (VHND) for pregnancy registration.

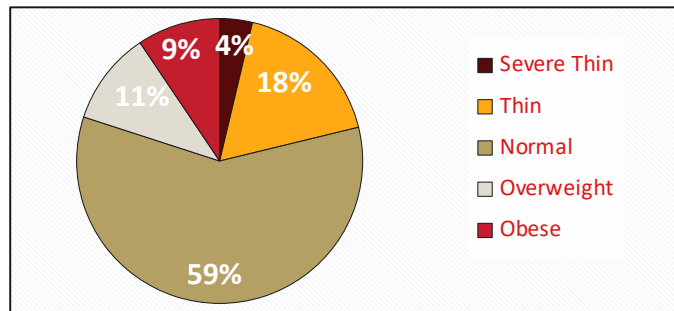
Methods:

- ❑ **3000 ANMs and 12000 ASHAs** were trained from of three districts of West Bengal in the years 2021-2023 on the concept of nutrition risk pregnancy, Body Mass Index, its impact on birth outcomes and effective nutrition counselling as per BMI.
- ❑ **A comprehensive maternal nutrition tool kit** was developed containing the training manuals, operational manual, tools for assessment and communication materials in the form of posters, leaflets and short videos on nutrition during pregnancy.
- ❑ **Handholding support** provided to ANMs in VHNDs for appropriate height & weight measurement and BMI calculation of all pregnant women before 20th week of pregnancy.
- ❑ Practice of **collection and collation of data on BMI** Status among pregnant women were introduced in the 1st Saturday meeting in the presence of Block Medical Officer and Public Health Nurse.



Results:

1 lakh 41 thousand pregnant women were assessed for their BMI status for the first time in West Bengal, by the state health workers operating within the public health system. It was found that **3.7 % and 17.5% of pregnant women were identified as Severe Thin and Thin** respectively where **20 % of the pregnant women were Overweight** among which **9.4 % were Obese**. These findings offered a clear insight into the diverse nutritional needs of pregnant women in the region.



Convergence and Advocacy

Convergence meetings and advocacy efforts with the **Departments of Health & Family Welfare** were commenced concurrently. After regular deliberations with Department, the component of BMI was included the **Matri Maa portal** (Department's own portal to track MCH services) from August 2022, which is being universally used across the state-now auto generates BMI status of all pregnancies across West Bengal -thereby allowing the state to estimate the number of women who entering pregnancy in a malnourished state.



Implication:

Assessing BMI status of at the time of pregnancy registration can be critical in early identification of risks and complications stemming from inadequate nutrition during pregnancy. While the attempt has been initiated by Govt. of West Bengal in its own portal, there is a compelling need to broaden the **scope and include the practice in larger RMNCHA policy framework** for the country.