

**Speech of Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad, Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare,  
Government of India**

**Launch Ceremony of Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram**

Date: 7 January 2014, Venue: Hotel Taj Palace, New Delhi, India

Keshav Desiraju, Secretary, Health

Anuradha Gupta Addl Secy and Mission Director, National Health Mission

Kate Gilmore, Deputy ED, UNFPA

Rakesh Kumar, Joint Secy

State Health Secretaries and Mission Directors

International and national experts

Development partners, civil society organizations, knowledge partners, media representatives

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, let me wish you all a very happy and productive new year. We have entered 2014 on a very positive note with encouraging decline in the national MMR.

It is down to 178 which is more than 70% decline since 1990. We used to lose 1.5 lakh, that is 150 thousand, mothers every year but now we are able to save more than 1 lakh, that is 100 thousand, of these mothers from dying.

MDG 5 of reducing maternal mortality by 75% by 2015 is now well within our reach.

This impressive achievement follows the strategic investments that we have made under the National Rural Health Mission which has been recently expanded to a National Health Mission. Besides rural areas, we would cover towns and cities under a newly launched National Urban Health Mission.

Reducing maternal and child mortality lies at the heart of the Mission unleashing several innovative programs from JSY in 2005 to JSSK in 2011, Home Based New Born Care and WIFS in 2012, and RBSK and National Iron Plus Initiative in 2013.

The strategies and tools are being constantly sharpened based on evidence and experience.

JSY, the world's largest conditional cash transfer scheme was conceived as a demand side intervention to promote institutional births. It witnessed phenomenal success with institutional deliveries rising from 47% in 2007 to 73% in 2009.

JSSK, a pathbreaking initiative, builds on JSY to eliminate out of pocket expenses for pregnant women and sick infants by providing free to and fro transport in addition to free drugs, diagnostics and diet.

Within a year of its launch, its impact is highly visible. The just released SRS data shows a surge of more than 7% in institutional deliveries in 2012 alone, mainly in public health facilities. More than 85% births in the country now have skilled attendance.

A staggering 1.66 crore that is 16.6 million women gave birth in government and accredited facilities last year.

JSSK also marks a paradigm shift away from user fee to free entitlements and a rights based approach. It has led to health systems strengthening that include dial 102 or 108 ambulance networks, provisioning of free drugs and diagnostics, targeted focus on equipping delivery points with infrastructure and trained HR and case load based untied grants.

468 MCH wings that would add more than 28000 beds for mothers and children are already under construction. We would whole heartedly support States to construct many more so that high case load facilities are decongested and quality of care is ensured.

Friends, many of you were present at the National Call to Action, Mahabalipuram on the eve of which we launched our highly ambitious Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram.

The roll out of this program has been very rapid. In 17 states, nearly 5000 mobile teams have become operational. 3.5 crore, that is 35 million, children have been screened for 4 Ds- defects, deficiencies, diseases and developmental delays including disabilities. 12 lakh, that is 1.2 million, have received referral support with nearly 1 lakh, that is 100 thousand, receiving free treatment at secondary and tertiary level.

I do hope that remaining states would also start full scale implementation soon and set up the 225 District Early Intervention Centres that we are aiming to establish this year.

At Mahabalipuram, we had also unveiled our new strategic approach to RMNCH+A in which 'A' denotes adolescents and the new focus on them without which maternal and child health outcomes would continue to elude us.

A lot has happened since. The 5 by 5 RMNCH+A matrix has been developed which lists out the 5 high impact interventions under each of the 5 pillars, all of which need to be implemented together at the same time, with high coverage and quality.

I am glad that 'State Calls to Action' have already happened in 22 states and taken this strategy to the grass roots, with intensification in 184 districts suffering from deep inequities.

I believe, a major step forward is harmonization of technical assistance by development partners who have placed more than 100 dedicated technical experts in these 184 high priority districts for need based planning and quality implementation.

We have introduced Score cards to track progress on key performance and quality indicators and set up an incentive fund under the National Health Mission to reward good performance.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Today's occasion has special significance as we deliver on our commitment to embark on a national adolescent health program.

We owe it to our 24 crore, that is 243million adolescents, who account for over 21% of our population to comprehensively address their health needs.

So far our effort has been partial, confined to sexual and reproductive health, that too at select government facilities.

Our new program, Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram, brings in several new dimensions such as mental health, nutrition, substance misuse, gender based violence and non communicable diseases.

It also introduces community based interventions through peer educators. It is underpinned by collaborations- with other Ministries, partners and stakeholders.

It is an evolving program that would lend itself to mid course corrections based on evidence and learnings.

I do hope the technical consultation that ensues would help states develop a clearer understanding of the rationale, contours and nuances of this new program for effective implementation.

Before I conclude, I must refer to another historic achievement that we must celebrate.

Six days from now, on the 13th, India completes 3 years without a single case of wild polio. It is a great public health landmark and I must congratulate all of you for having played a role in this momentous victory over polio.

We fought this challenge successfully and we shall similarly work on adolescent health as a gateway to the well being of the nation.

Jai Hind !