

Anganwadi Approach to Nutrition, Growth and Nurturing: The Project AANGAN

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Early childhood development (ECD) has emerged as a significant change agent in achieving sustainable development supported by research. It focuses on pre-birth to below 6 years age children for their all-round development (brain, body, socio-emotional). It can also reduce many vulnerabilities and inequalities, including gender bias. Lately, international community has recognized the importance of ECD [1].

In recent years, the Indian government has spearheaded early childhood development and education initiatives. The ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education) Policy 2013 [2] and The National Food Security Act [3] are supportive to ECD. India has the world's largest ECD program – the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme [4]. Anganwadi Centers (AWCs) have been established in every corner of the country, and are the only public institution aiming to reach all children aged less than six years. It caters to primary healthcare, referral to secondary healthcare, immunization, supplementary nutrition, growth monitoring, and pre-school education. Special care is taken to reach marginalized populations. High load of malnutrition of all sorts, educational deficits, safety issues and health problems are overwhelming in India. AWCs act as the grassroot units of change to deal with all these issues. However, there is a desired need to strengthen them by supporting effective implementation, coordination and convergence with various departments at every level.

The National Health Mission had envisaged participation and utilization of the private sector in public health services [5]. Mobilization of private sector health workforce by their capacity building in terms of orientation toward public health services is one of the available solutions to move toward wider coverage of public health services. Inclination toward availing services from private sector is also corroborated from NFHS-4 report, which states that almost half of the health care in times of sickness is availed from the private sector.

Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP) is committed to improve health of children by imparting latest education and training of members and other stakeholders of child health in India and abroad; and doing advocacy and technical collaboration for the same. Many of our members are actively doing social community work in various aspects of child health. Under IAP Action Plan 2019-20, we envisage a proposal for involvement of our members to strengthen working of AWCs in following areas through Project AANGAN (Anganwadi Approach to Nutrition, Growth and Nurturing):

1. Nutrition Education: Nutrition of pregnant, lactating mothers and children, including breastfeeding and complementary feeding counseling, and fighting junk food menace
2. Growth monitoring and referral to appropriate centers whenever indicated
3. Developmental screening and referral
4. Child protection and safety education
5. Health and immunization education and services
6. Nurturing responsive care and parenting skills
7. Data management for research

Members can choose the field of their involvement on voluntary basis, and work by strengthening education and training or serving directly to children, consistently for a long-defined period.

While we discuss and finalize logistics with government, a pilot project of AANGAN was launched on 26 February 2019. We appeal members to come forward voluntarily and contribute to the cause by enrolling their commitment by reply email to aagan@iapindia.org.

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