

## Panchayati Raj Ministry gears up to address vulnerabilities of rural India in combating COVID-19 pandemic

### Panchayati Raj Ministry Issues Advisory for the Guidance of Panchayats to combat the COVID-19 Pandemic

Advisory includes Intensive Communication Campaign to augment awareness levels in rural communities

States advised to utilize elected representatives of Panchayats to spearhead the movement by undertaking extensive mitigation activities

Finance Ministry, on the Recommendation of Panchayati Raj Ministry, Releases Rs.8,923.8 crore to 25 states for Providing Grant to Rural Local Bodies

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The spread of COVID-19 pandemic in different parts of the country has recently assumed serious proportions. The vulnerabilities of the rural communities need to be especially addressed. Comparatively low level of awareness amongst the rural population coupled with inadequate support systems in villages may create a constraining situation in dealing with the pandemic in an effective manner. Hence, the Panchayats/Rural Local Bodies need to be properly sensitized and facilitated towards meeting the challenge and provide leadership as they did last year and received appreciation at the highest level for various measures.

Keeping the above factors in view, the Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance, has on the recommendation of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR), released an amount of Rs.8,923.8 crore to 25

states for providing Grant to rural local bodies. The amount released is the first instalment of the Basic (Untied) Grants and may be utilized among other things for various prevention and mitigation measures needed to combat the Covid pandemic. The Ministry has also issued advisory for the guidance of Panchayats as regards the action for combating the COVID-19 pandemic, which *inter alia* includes the following areas:

- i. Intensive communication campaign for the awareness of rural communities on the nature of the COVID-19 infection, and preventive and mitigative measures, in accordance with the advice of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), doctors and medical institutions etc, while especially taking care to dispel false notions and beliefs. The background material and creatives for this awareness campaign may be drawn suitably from the digital repository of MoHFW, Govt of India. (<https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=1bXkzSNRKF8-4KTakYXA0J7sfVUR1eFm>). Their leaflet on “Clinical Guidance for Management of Adult COVID-19 Patients”, available on the link: <https://www.mohfw.gov.in/pdf/COVID19ManagementAlgorithm22042021v1.pdf>, would prove handy for the awareness campaign.
- ii. To draw the frontline volunteers for the campaign from the local community viz. elected panchayat representatives, teachers, ASHA workers etc.
- iii. Providing suitable facilities with necessary protective equipment like finger oxy-meters, N-95 masks, infrared thermal scanning instruments, sanitisers etc.
- iv. Display of the information on availability of testing / vaccination centers, doctors, hospital beds etc on real-time basis to facilitate effective utilization of available infrastructure by the rural citizens.
- (v) To leverage the available IT infrastructure in the Panchayat offices, Schools, Common Service Centers etc. may be leveraged for tracking and information display
- vi. To activate the Panchayats to provide the necessary institutional village level support catering to their respective locations. Wherever possible, they may improvise households as home quarantine locations, where maximum of the asymptomatic Covid positive cases can be managed. Additionally they may also set up specific quarantine/isolation centers for the needy and returning migrant labourers. In consultation with the Health Dept, the Panchayats may be designated to facilitate vaccination drives to ensure maximum coverage of eligible population.
- vii. Providing relief and rehabilitation measures considering the distress and livelihood hindrances that are likely to arise due to the spread of the virus. For this purpose, various Central and State Government welfare schemes may be leveraged towards provision of rations, drinking water supply, sanitation, MGNREGS employment etc so that these reach the right beneficiaries. The Panchayats should be directly involved in dispensation of such relief, including to all vulnerable sections viz. senior citizens, women, children, differently abled etc.
- viii. Establishing a proper inter-linkage with the medical facilities at the nearby District and Sub-Districts so that emergency requirements like ambulances, advanced testing and treatment facilities, multi-speciality care etc are provided to those in need without much loss of time.

The States have been further advised that the elected representatives of Panchayats may take the lead with cooperation of various other service volunteers in their areas. Village / Ward-level Committees / Nigrani Samitis in this regard may be created /activated, if not already done, to spearhead the movement by undertaking extensive mitigation activities. Apart from advising the Panchayats to utilize the available XIV /

XV FC grants as per guidelines, the possibility of provision of additional funds to them from the NDRF/SDRF may also be considered.

Responding enthusiastically, the States have taken various measures including innovative one worth citing and emulating by other States. Transport plan of provisioning of ambulances in each Gram Panchayats to support the health system, two chambered cars and auto rickshaws for the needy, ambulances in frontline treatment centres of Kerala, **self-proclaimed lockdown** by PRIs in Gujarat, **migrant database** for capturing the return migrants in the panchayats both from outside the state and within the state by Assam and **eSanjeevani OPD**, free online medical consultation for sick people by Himachal Pradesh are worth commendable. The major intervention by 19 States as on 13.05.2021 as communicated to MoPR in combating the second wave of COVID-19 and as is compiled at MoPR end is at [Annexure](#).

The MoPR has carried out a review of the action taken by the Rural Local Bodies (RLBs) of different States and further written to each of the States on 12.05.2021 communicating to them, further steps that may be taken by the RLBs to effectively combat the COVID-19 pandemic. The **SoPs on COVID-19 Containment and Management in Peri-urban, Rural and Tribal Areas** issued by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, available at the web-link : <https://www.mohfw.gov.in/pdf/SOPonCOVID19Containment&ManagementinPeriurbanRural&tribalareas.pdf>, has also been sent to States / UTs with a request **to get the SOP document translated into the required regional language and share with all concerned stakeholders so that SOPs percolate to the grassroots level.**

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