



Bihar Technical Support Program Responding to COVID-19

CARE and COVID-19

CARE's extensive footprint and multi-sectoral humanitarian and development programming in 100 countries has allowed us to rapidly and dramatically pivot our existing work in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic. CARE is currently working with partners in over 63 countries supporting the most marginalized, including women and girls, in the fight against COVID-19. In India, where CARE has been able to build off of a nearly 10-year partnership with the Government of Bihar to strengthen the state's health system, we have been able to respond quickly and effectively. CARE India has a team of 1,500+ staff supporting the Government of Bihar in contact tracing, monitoring, infection control, and laboratory and hospital strengthening in response to COVID. In addition to these concerted efforts in Bihar, CARE India is also providing support in Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh states and has reached 104 million people thus far in the country.

CARE India's response plan outlines three critical areas of programmatic support that will aid in combating COVID-19: 1) Providing support to governments at policy levels for structural shifts to meet outbreak requirements; 2) Supporting service provision through support to health facilities and health providers 3) Supporting outreach to communities through frontline workers and women's groups to adopt preventative practices, hygiene behaviors, create linkages to testing and treatment services for COVID-19 and address livelihood challenges caused by the disruption in their earnings due to extended lockdowns.

Responding through The Bihar Technical Support Program

Since 2011, with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, CARE India has been supporting the Government of Bihar to reduce rates of maternal, newborn, child mortality and nutrition and strengthen the health system through the [Bihar Technical Support Program](#). CARE's work in Bihar is reviving a health system that is creating sustainable change for India's most vulnerable citizens. CARE, in partnership with the government, has also sought to activate a gender-sensitive health system in order to respond to and prevent violence against women in Bihar through the Sajha Initiative.

As COVID-19 continues to spread, it threatens to dismantle the significant progress achieved in Bihar and increase the vulnerability of poor and marginalized communities in the state. To respond to this significant need, CARE India has deployed 1,500+ staff to Bihar to assist the government in its COVID19 response, working at policy, facility and community levels to ensure humanitarian aid is reaching the last mile.

For more information visit:
<https://www.careindia.org/covid-19/>
<http://bihar.care.org/>

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Reaching the last mile

The 1,500-person team in Bihar is supporting the government in various aspects of the COVID-19 response. CARE has been officially recognized as an essential service provider as is therefore exempt from current curfews and lockdown orders, which has allowed staff to move throughout the state to provide life-saving services. Some of CARE's support has consisted of procuring essential supplies such as N-95 masks for the government health personnel, personal protective equipment (PPE) to frontline health workers and support for migrant laborers. Through the Sajha Initiative, protocols on service provision for gender-based violence (GBV) prioritize support to government staff to respond to survivors during the outbreak and prioritize safety planning and psychological first aid. These protocols are being utilized by the Government of Bihar in the pilot district, and wider application by the government across the state is being discussed as a health systems strengthening approach to GBV response. Building on CARE's work in the Bihar Technical Support Program, actions have been taken to support the Government of Bihar to adapt to COVID-19 through policy implementation, support to health facilities and workers, and surveillance, monitoring and contact tracing in communities across all 38 districts in the state. CARE is part of the inter-agency task force for COVID Response set up by Government of Bihar. Between the inter-agency partners- CARE, WHO and UNICEF- the districts have been allocated to lead and coordinate the COVID response. While being present in the entire state, CARE plays the lead coordinator role in 14 of the 38 districts in Bihar.

Policy level actions

Leveraging the strong partnership and working relationship between CARE and the Government of Bihar, CARE staff is streamlining procurement and supply chain management that is enabling the efficient procurement of necessary supplies and equipment for the response. Additionally, there is work with the Bihar Medical Supplies Corporation to procure supplies like masks, PPE and ventilators. Technical support is also being provided to develop and notify the Bihar Epidemic Disease COVID-19 Regulation 2020 and CARE has also provided inputs to amend the Epidemic Control Act for the COVID-19 context.

Through CARE India's work in the Sajha initiative, a pilot program that seeks to activate a gender-sensitive health system response to violence against women and girls, CARE is also well positioned in its support to the government to update GBV pathways to reflect the most recent information on COVID, including the importance of addressing violence against women during an outbreak and sharing updated information on availability of services with service providers.

Facility level actions

CARE's team in Bihar is fully involved in the pandemic response, as part of the Emergency Response Team of the department of health, guiding the day to day strategic decisions and communications. Support to guideline development and implementation to regularize the routine essential services at health facilities and outreach is also being done by CARE. Staff are working across all districts in Bihar in the district control rooms and are helping clean and set up isolation centers. They are also helping the state ramp up testing facilities from one center to four centers.

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With the disruption to essential health services, CARE staff are building on the work of the Sajha initiative to help facility-based government counselors respond to emergency cases of physical or sexual trauma which may arise during lockdown. This support includes discussing the need for supply of family planning methods (including oral contraceptive pills, emergency contraception, etc.)

Community level actions

At the community level, CARE is working with government staff in contract tracing and monitoring of COVID-19 cases. Contract tracing of positive cases is the most significant contribution of the CARE team, as they are working with the district manager in Patna to implement a robust process for active contract tracing and verification. Staff are also working to track foreign travelers through phone calls or home visits to see if they are quarantined and if they are symptomatic. Follow up with community quarantine centers (where domestic travelers are lodged) is also taking place, though there are challenges with some resisting testing.

CARE's district office staff have been mobilized to support health workers, including lab technicians, frontline workers, ambulance drivers and emergency medical teams through various trainings. Staff are also supporting frontline health workers during household visits to migrant households (as these households have been identified to be at high risk of transmission). This support also includes door to door visits to survey households for cases of flu or severe respiratory illnesses. Support is also being provided to help communities adopt appropriate preventive practices, hygiene behaviors and creating linkages to testing and treatment services for COVID-19.

Placing significant importance on the issue of violence against women, especially during this time of crisis, CARE is also providing psychological first aid by phone for survivors reaching out to Sajha counselors, including self-care for survivors asking about COVID-19. Support is also being provided to survivors to help devise a safety plan if violence escalates by asking her to save the numbers of one or more friends and/or neighbor on the quick-dial screen, who she could reach out to in case violence aggravates or there is any emergency, and advising her to get out of the house and inform the nearest police personnel if violence becomes threatening.

CARE India continues to accelerate our response to COVID-19 to ensure we reach the most vulnerable and marginalized communities.

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