



# Aeon of COVID and School Health Wellness Program under Ayushman Bharat; Approaches and Challenges: State's unambiguous endeavour

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## Abstract

Good health is an essence for national development. The health and education are fundamental in our quest to achieve Sustainable Development Goals 2030. Schools provide a rostrum to improve both the education and health status of learners throughout the nation. The School Health and Wellness Programme under AYUSHMAN BHARAT is a joint collaborative programme between the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Human Resource & Development. This initiative implicates both education and health implementers and is contemplated to facilitate an interspersed approach to health programming and more effective learning at the school level. Afterward, the quality education and good health is an onus of all of us, thereupon it is vital that learners, teachers, health workers, parents and communities are jointly betrothed to bring about an amelioration of the overall situation of health and well-being of the students.

**Keyword: School and Health Wellness Programme, COVID, Health and wellness Ambassadors**

## Introduction

India is home to 47.3 crore children (0–18 years) comprising 39 percent of the country's total population (Census 2011). The recent data suggests around 26 crore children in the age group of 6-18 years are attending schools. <sup>1</sup>

Over the years the country has made great traipse in improving avenues akin to quality education, increasing elementary school enrolment and reducing the number of out-of-school children. The accomplishments have been bolstered by disparate laws, policies and programmes such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act (2009), Right to Education Act (2010), National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy (2013).<sup>2</sup>

The schools serve as a succorer to disseminate education on health issues, institute in them healthy behaviours, forge linkages with services and reach parents and community through the students.<sup>1</sup>

With this provenience, the Government of India in 2013 launched the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK) under the National Health Mission (NHM) for early detection and timely management of illnesses among children (0-18 years). In perpetuation, in 2014, the Government launched a comprehensive programme called, 'Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram' (RKSK) to respond to the health and development requirements of adolescents in a holistic manner.<sup>1</sup>

Inferably, the Government of India has launched "School Health Program" under Ayushman Bharat to strengthen the preventive and promotive aspects through health promotion activities. These activities will combine health education, health promotion, disease prevention, and improve access to health services in an integrated, systemic manner at the school level. There will be increased focus on emerging social morbidities like injuries, violence, substance abuse, risky sexual behaviours, psychological and emotional disorders. Evidence shows that school health programme offer high cost benefit ratio and schools can be used adroitly to implement the health activities.<sup>1</sup>

### **School Health Program under Ayushman Bharat**

It is a joint initiative of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Human Resource & Development. The school health promotion activities will be arrayed in all the government and government aided schools of the country. The bale of services under school health include health promotion activities, health screening, provision of services like providing IFA, sanitary napkins and age appropriate vaccination, marinating electronic health record of each child, training teachers on basic first aid.<sup>1</sup>

### **Operationalization of School Health and Wellness Programme**

This initiative is targeting both Education and Health implementers and is envisaged to facilitate an integrated approach to health programming and more effective learning at the school level. Two teachers in every school

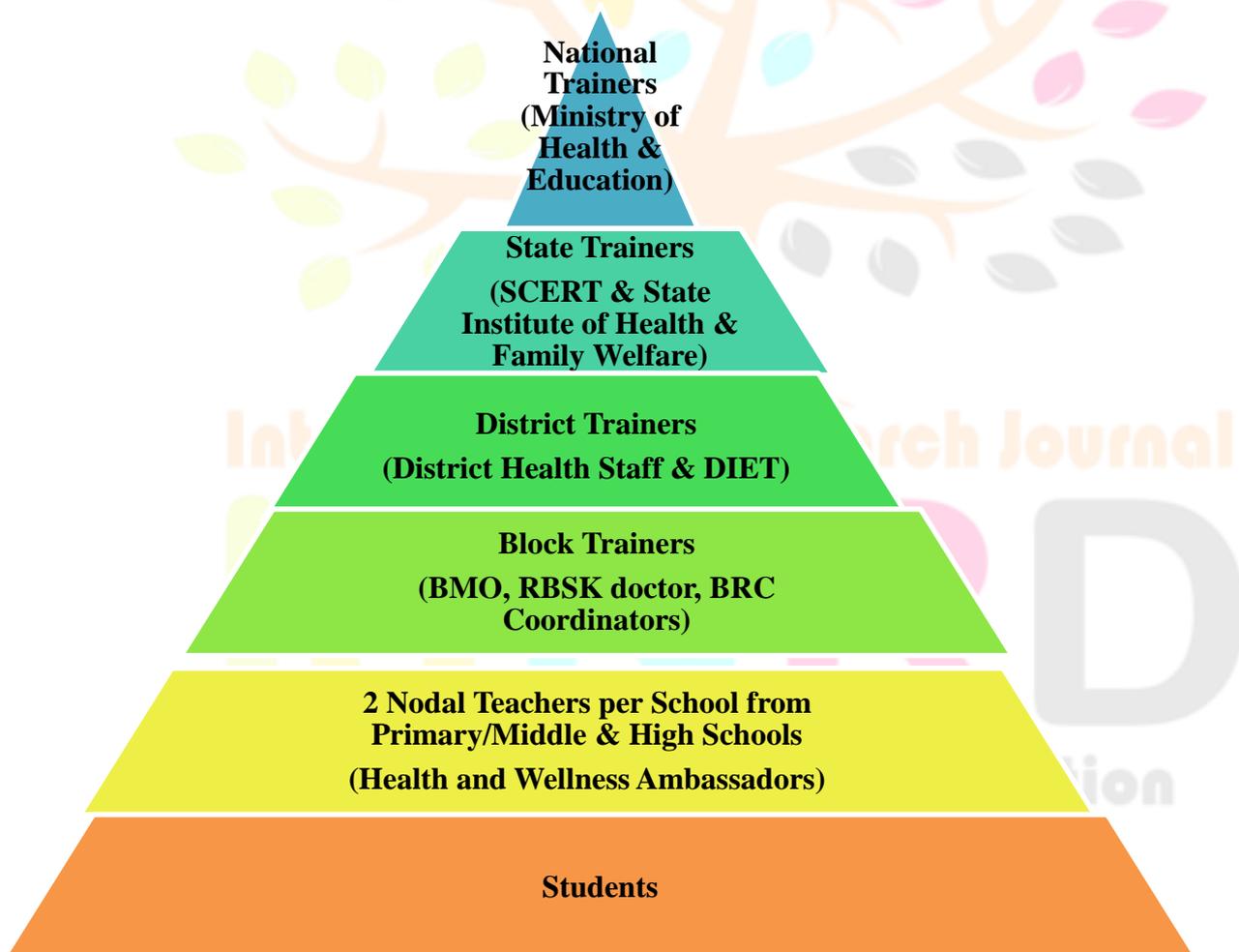
will be declared as “Health and Wellness Ambassadors” preferably one male and one female and who will

transact weekly health promotion and disease prevention information in the form of interactive activities.<sup>3</sup>

These health promotion messages will also have bearing on improving health practices in the country as students will act as Health and Wellness Messengers in the society. Every Tuesday may be dedicated as Health and Wellness Day in the schools.<sup>1</sup>

The health promotion activities include the themes of the existing Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) of MoHFW: Improving Nutrition, Improving Sexual and Reproductive Health, Enhancing Mental Health, Preventing Injuries and Violence (including GBV), Preventing Substance Misuse, Addressing conditions for Non-Communicable Diseases.

For **Capacity Building** of Health and Wellness Ambassadors a cascade model of training is to be followed (figure 1).



**Figure 1: National Cascade Model of Training**

## Model Adopted by the State: **Inter Departmental Coordination among Health and Education during COVID- 19 pandemic**

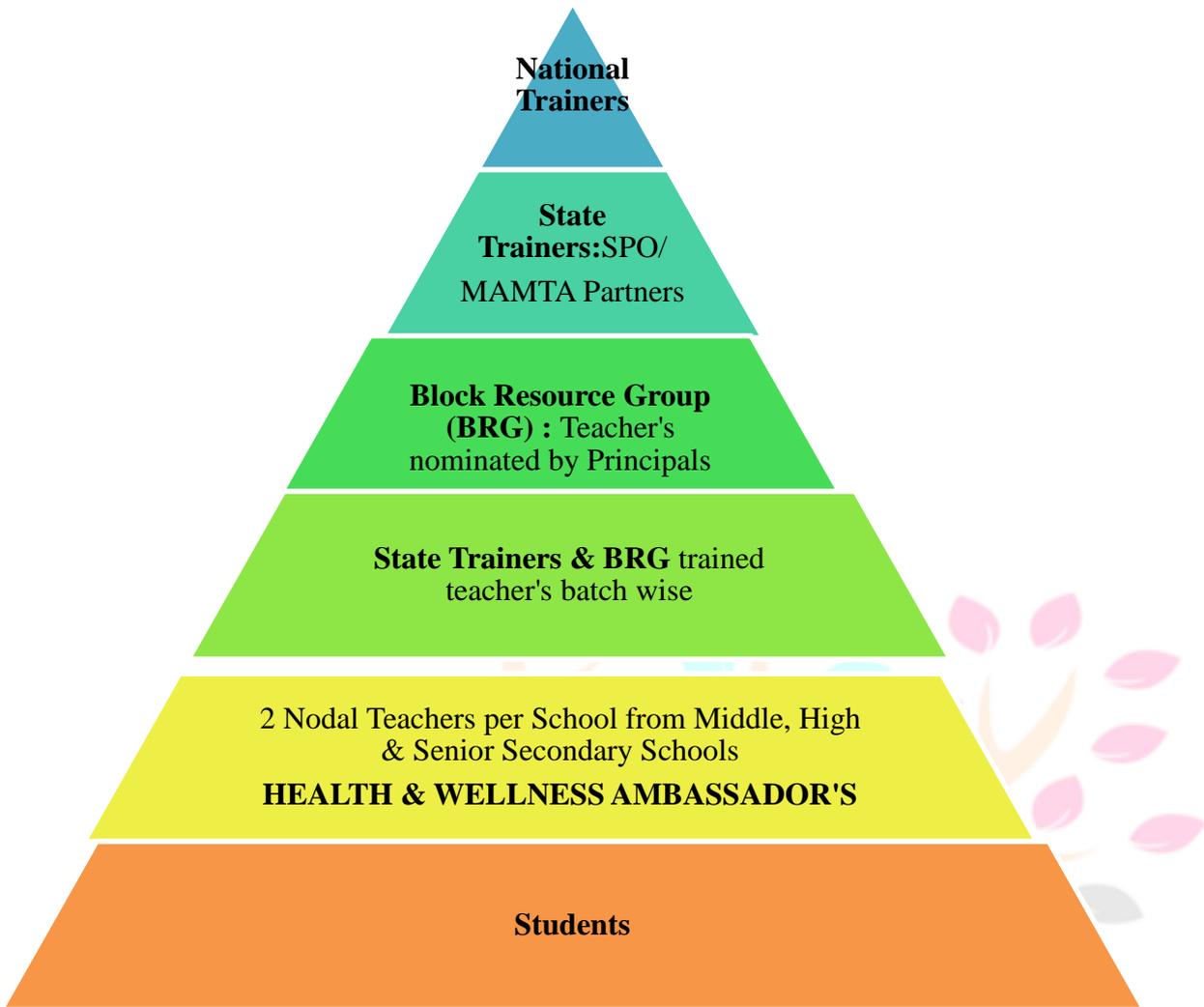
The aeon of COVID-19 has posed myriad of impediments for the health sectors in the country. It has remained a contentious topic since its inception in the year 2020. Besides staggering the disparate aspects of human life, Covid-19 pandemic has greatly disrupted access to education in India. Enunciating the implementation of RKSK in the State of Himachal Pradesh during COVID-19, it was again an arduous task, as most of the health care workers were betrothed in steering this pandemic.

Perspectively, the training model as proposed at National level for School Health & Wellness Ambassadors under Ayushman Bharat could not be appared at the State level. Subsequently, the State adopted its own model (figure 2) to provide training as desired. A conscientious organizational setup for coordination of health and education departments was framed at all levels and was sent as joint signatory directions. Various departments of education like Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, SCERT, Directorate of Higher Education, Directorate of Elementary Education and DIET centres were directly coordinating with National Health Mission.

**Capacity Building:** Initially the capacity building for School Health and Wellness Programme was done with the help of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Human Resource Development during the training of State Resource Group. Thenceforth, it was followed by training of Health educator's as mentors and teachers (nominated by respective principals) as a Block resource Group. At the hindmost, the State had state Resource Group (SRG) and Block resource Group (BRG) to train Nodal teachers from schools as Health & Wellness Ambassadors. The virtual trainings were conducted at all levels, so no cost was incurred. The quality of training was assured by direct interaction with the State level TOTs.

**Achievement:** The earnest endeavour of trainings was consummated in a finite time of four months. In the course of time we had a pool of 35 HE's trained as mentors, 442 teachers as BRG group, who further spawned 6000 plus Health & wellness Ambassador's.

**Partners involved for implementation:** MAMTA Health Institute for Mother and Child was involved throughout the implementation of programme. The coordination among various departments was facilitated by MAMTA HIMC at every level.



**Figure 2: State Model of Training**

### **Conclusion and Way forward:**

Government of India had proffered a state training model based on the situation in 2019 and resources available at that time. In the onerous time of Covid 19 pandemic the proposed strategy could not be implemented in the state as the priorities were changed and resources were finite. Many states could not implement the programme but the state of Himachal Pradesh could contrive it pertinently by having its own model. State could glean out the opportunity of hard time of pandemic which was need of the hour and could triple fold the achievement.

RKSK programme has been dealing with the healthy population, but covid taught us that healthful population can also be at peril and acknowledging their concerns during pandemic was a big-league. Though health is impelled by the health department, but during lock down the education department was dealing with adolescents and their issues, consequently the synergy with the education department made it facile to address the solicitousness of the adolescents.

There is ecumenical averment that the healthier children have improved scholastic acumen. The School health programme under AYUSHMAN BHARAT, together with several other initiatives of both the Ministries would bring long term health and scholastic benefits to children and adolescents.<sup>1</sup>

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**Conflict of Interest:** None

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<sup>3</sup> UNESCO; Health and Education Resource Centre; available from:

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