



Protecting the health of informal women workers through COVID-19: Lok Swasthya SEWA Trust

The global pandemic of COVID-19 has resulted in a large-scale public health crisis that has required a total lock-down in India. This has inflicted a severe blow on people's lives, especially workers of the informal economy, especially women, who are the poor and vulnerable segment of our population.

While the government's response in tackling the outbreak was measured, it has not effectively reached those who are particularly vulnerable, including women workers, children and migrant workers. Informal workers are also especially at risk given the conditions within which they reside, and the lack of proper information and amenities to which they have access. They are struggling to obtain food, basic supplies and shelter. This creates another layer of health and well-being concerns that require concerted effort to tackle, not to mention the possibility of shortages of medicine stocks that are likely to occur in various pockets of the country.

On the whole, India's health sector finds itself precariously placed, and we require funds, sustained coordination and diligent planning in order to ensure that we can protect it.

Who we are

We are the social security team of the Self-Employed Women's Association, SEWA, a national union of 1.7 million women workers of the informal economy. Lok Swasthya SEWA Trust (LSST) was set up by SEWA's health cooperative, Lok Swasthya, which contributes from its profits from the sale of allopathic and Ayurvedic medicines, and other revenue sources, towards overall social security of informal workers--health care, child care, insurance, shelter and more. It is a registered trust since 2005 and has 80G or tax exempt status.

We have received donations and projects from the WHO, UNDP, WIEGO, Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiative (APPI), the Mridulaben Sarabhai Foundation and other Indian and overseas donors and private individuals. For more information, please see our [website: www.lokswasthyasewatrust.org](http://www.lokswasthyasewatrust.org)

What we do

Lok Swasthya SEWA Trust works to provide all-round primary health care, including but not limited to preventive and life-saving health information along with referral health services, to women workers and their families. It also provides full-day child care, livelihood support and education on insurance.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, we did the following:

1. **Health education and awareness:** Our cadre of frontline health workers are working closely with the district health authorities to disseminate accurate information on COVID-19, what this disease is, simple do's and don'ts and also monitoring in communities, in addition to providing support to access referral care. They also counsel people and dispel stigma. Similar to this, we are working with high-risk groups in Ahmedabad for tuberculosis information dissemination.
2. **Childcare centres:** The provision of full-day, quality and affordable childcare is crucial in enabling women's labour force participation. During the COVID outbreak, while we have had to shut down the centres, our women continue to cook and provide nutritious meals to the children and their families.
3. **Lok Swasthya Cooperative:** Registered in 1991, LSM is a health cooperative with 1800 members, including midwives and other frontline health workers. LSM runs 3 low-cost medicine shops in Ahmedabad city, as well as their own Ayurveda production unit. During the COVID lockdown, LSM has continued to run its medicine shops - open 24 X 7 and staffed entirely by local women. The Ayurveda production centre obtained permission from the Drug Commissioner of Gujarat to manufacture and sell low-cost hand sanitisers. These are being sold through the shops.



Response to COVID-19

To sustain LSST's work in extending health services to informal women workers requires funding support, more so in a crisis like the COVID-19.

- Continued health awareness and referral work through online health training and provision of health information and life-saving messages, for 3 months.
Funding needed: Rs 6 lakhs
- Initiating a mental health helpline, in partnership with experts, for 6 months
Funding needed: Rs 12 lakhs
- Provision of nutritious meals to children (0-6 years), who are now unable to come to the childcare centres
Funding needed : Rs 3 lakhs per month for food at all centres
- Food and ration packets for community distribution, for a month. We focus first on those who are particularly vulnerable in a crisis - the elderly, female-headed households, differently abled, high-risk groups for TB and other illnesses
Funding needed: Rs 500 per ration packet for 10,000 families per month or Rs 50 lakhs per month
- Health kits - face masks and sanitiser/soap - for community distribution during the initial lockdown
Funding needed: Rs 150 per kit X10,000 households, or Rs 15 lakhs

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