An App and Program That Saves Lives and Is As Cost Effective As Vaccines

PRESS BRIEF

Uttar Pradesh, one of the largest and most populous states in India, where even basic health care for mothers and children is often inaccessible, has some of the highest numbers of maternal and child deaths. In Kaushambi District, where this program operates, mothers and infants die at a rate more than double the national average.

In 2011, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) began working in Kaushambi District with the local team of Accredited Social Health Activists. Better known as ASHAs, India’s government health system introduced this cadre of female community health workers to generate demand for health services, and to serve as a platform for information and a link to the formal health system. Through the Reducing Maternal and Newborn Deaths (ReMiND) program, CRS introduced a mobile health (mHealth) application using the CommCare platform developed by Dimagi Inc., a social enterprise company. ASHAs use the application on smartphones to improve their performance, and thereby increase use of health services by women.

In 2015, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded an independent team from the Post Graduate Institute for Medical Education and Research in Chandigarh, led by Dr. Shankar Prinja, to analyze the cost effectiveness of the program. The study evaluated how effective and efficient the ReMiND program is in saving women’s and children’s lives.

Analyzing the costs of the program since its inception in 2011, the study concluded that the interventions introduced by ReMiND in Uttar Pradesh were extremely cost effective and recommended exploring opportunities to increase the project’s scale. The study found that the ReMiND mHealth intervention is as cost effective as Vitamin A and zinc fortification, measles immunization, pneumonia case management and oral rehydration therapy. Within India, the intervention was as cost effective as vaccination against measles and Hepatitis B. It is more cost effective than vaccines against cholera, typhoid and rotavirus. The study projected that implementing the program for 10 years across Uttar Pradesh would prevent 16,918 maternal deaths and 119,646 neonatal deaths. Articles with findings from the study are being published in peer-reviewed journals.

Photo Credit: Jennifer Hardy/CRS
Researchers compared the findings of this study to a number of key public health interventions, for which the cost effectiveness has been estimated. The study found that ReMiND interventions are as cost effective as Vitamin A and zinc fortification, measles immunization, pneumonia case management and oral rehydration therapy. Within India, the intervention is as cost effective as vaccination against measles and Hepatitis B. It is even more cost effective than vaccines against cholera, typhoid and rotavirus.

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It will cost the Uttar Pradesh health system $96 to prevent a year lived with disability and $2792 for every life saved.