

## Recent data on child malnutrition underscore the value of good school meals

The approval of the PM POSHAN scheme by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs until 2025-26 comes at a critical time when real income declines and the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have affected the ability of families to ensure good nutrition.

The findings in Phase I of the NFHS-5 for 22 States and Union Territories in December 2020 were shocking: childhood stunting rose in 13 States, there was high prevalence of anaemia among children and women, and wasting was a serious concern in 12 States. The slippage over the previous survey period exposes the worsening scourge of malnutrition, threatening to deprive millions of children of a fully productive adult life.

It will take a serious effort to address this hidden crisis, backed by strong budgetary commitment. The centrally supported hot meal programme in Government and Government-aided schools, covering 11.8 crore children, will be supplemented with nutritional elements in identified aspirational districts and areas with high anaemia.

The scheme, which is proposed to be extended to pre-primary children, provides for social audit, creation of school nutritional gardens to source fresh produce, involvement of farmer-producer organisations as providers, and lays emphasis on local food traditions. While these are positive features, momentum towards eradicating malnutrition hinges crucially on annual budgetary outlays and proof of POSHAN's working will lie in measurable outcomes.

Support for the PM POSHAN, which the Government says has been approved over the five-year period at ₹1,30,794 crore, including ₹31,733 crore from States and UTs, must remain elastic. While some child growth metrics such as stunting require a longer window to measure, problems such as anaemia and low weight lend themselves to speedy amelioration.

The Government must demonstrate that Saksham Anganwadi-Mission POSHAN 2.0, which amalgamates the POSHAN Abhiyan and schemes covering anganwadis, crèches and adolescent girls, is fiscally stronger than its erstwhile component parts.

There must be a meaningful increase in the current Budget estimate over the combined past outlay for the subsumed individual schemes. On nutritional planning, the renewed plan should introduce a greater diversity of diets that compensates for micronutrient and protein deficiency.

Strong supplementation of nutrition at school, in the community, and at childcare centres is critical at a time when criticism of food inflation has met with a tone-deaf response, and pandemic-induced income declines have depressed essential consumption.


The lower offtake of foodgrains for the noon meal scheme during the pandemic over the previous year and patchy food distribution mechanisms in many States should set alarm bells ringing. The future of a generation of Indians is at stake.


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Press Information Bureau


**CABINET DECISIONS**  
29 SEPTEMBER 2021


**PM POSHAN-  
PM POSHAN SHAKTI NIRMAN**


**1/2**

 National Scheme for Mid Day Meal in Schools' renamed as '**National Scheme for PM POSHAN in Schools**'

 **11.80 crore children** studying in **11.20 lakh schools covered**

 Financial outlay of **Rs.54 thousand crore** from **Central Government**

 Financial outlay of **Rs.31,733.17 crore** from **States and UTs**

 Central Government to bear additional cost of **₹45,000 crore on foodgrains**

## GS World Team Input

### **\*IN THE NEWS\***

#### **About PM-POSHAN Scheme :-**

- ➔ Union Cabinet has approved the Prime Minister POSHAN scheme or PM-POSHAN for providing one hot cooked meal in Government and Government-aided schools.
- ➔ The scheme will replace the existing national programme for mid-day meal in schools or Mid-day Meal Scheme.
- ➔ It has been launched for an initial period of five years (2021-22 to 2025-26).
- ➔ The scheme will cover 11.8 crore students enrolled in classes 1 to 8 in over 11.2 lakh schools across the country.
- ➔ The scheme will be extended to students studying in pre-primary or Balvatikas running in government and government aided primary schools.
- ➔ The new scheme has a provision for supplementary nutrition for children in aspirational districts and those with high prevalence of anaemia.
- ➔ The central government will ensure Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) from states to schools, which will use it to cover cooking costs.
- ➔ The Centre will bear Rs. 54,061 crore of the total estimated cost of Rs 1.3 lakh crore, with the states paying Rs 31,733 crore (Rs 45,000 crore will be released by the Centre as subsidies for food grains).

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## Expected Questions (Prelims Exams)

**Q. Consider the following statements about PM Nutrition Scheme-**

1. This scheme will replace the national program of Mid-Day-Meal.
2. It is a central sector scheme.

Which of the above statement is/are true-

- (a) Only 1                      (b) Only 2  
(c) Both 1 and 2              (d) Neither 1 nor 2

## Expected Questions (Mains Exams)

**Q. Discuss the present status of nutrition at the level of children in India. In the place of Mid-Day-Meal Scheme How the Pradhan Mantri Poshan Yojana brought by the Central Government will prove to be helpful in solving this problem?**

**(250 Words)**

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**Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC main examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.**