



Merck for Mothers in India

It all starts with a mother—she’s the beginning of a much bigger story. A healthy pregnancy and safe childbirth lead to a lifetime of benefits, both for her own health and prosperity as well as that of her children, family, community and nation—for generations to come. We call this the “Mom Effect.”

About Merck for Mothers

[Merck for Mothers](#) is Merck’s global initiative to help create a world where no woman has to die while giving life. Through collaborations and grantmaking, we have reached more than 11 million women in nearly 50 sites around the world with programs to support healthier pregnancies and safer childbirths, contributing to the global effort to help end maternal mortality and morbidity. Applying Merck’s business and scientific resources, we are working across sectors to improve the health and well-being of women during pregnancy, childbirth and the months after.

Our Approach in India

Over the last few decades, India has achieved great success in improving maternal health. The country’s maternal mortality ratio plummeted by 80% between 1990 and 2018. Despite this reduction, India still has one of the highest burdens of maternal mortality in the world. India is second only to Nigeria in total annual maternal deaths — in 2017 alone, 35,000 women in India died from complications of pregnancy and childbirth.² Improving the quality of maternity care — as well as access to this care — is essential so that every woman in the country can receive quality services wherever and whenever she seeks care. Though up to 50% of women in India seek maternity care from the private sector³, there is no consensus on national quality standards for private maternity care and no national accreditation to assure the quality of this care.

Since 2013, Merck for Mothers has taken a comprehensive approach to advancing the quality of private maternity care in India to meet women’s maternal health needs. Our goal is to expand the pool of high quality facilities available to women and to payors and contribute to India’s efforts to achieve Universal Health Coverage. Merck for Mothers works with a diverse group of collaborators, including governments, non-profit organizations, quality improvement experts, advocates and other innovators to help end preventable maternal mortality in India. We follow core principles that are true to our values: taking women-centered approaches, expanding access to quality care using the power of digital technologies and unlocking innovative financing mechanisms for long-term sustainability.

Our Focus Areas



Advancing Women's Maternity Care Experiences

Increasing Awareness and Access to Patient Driven, Quality Care

Women often do not have the information they need to make informed decisions about their reproductive health. In response, we have supported the development and deployment of [askNivi](#) — an artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled chatbot that educates people about the full range of reproductive health topics including available contraceptive methods to meet a woman's needs and then connects her with a quality provider who has her chosen method in stock. Since the launch of askNivi in India in 2019, the AI-enabled chatbot has been learning continuously based on information from over 1.8 million users in India — so that people receive more personalized information along their health journeys.

Collaborator: Nivi

Establishing a Feedback Loop to Inform Care

Health care in India seldom incorporates patients' experiences and outcomes - or educates patients on what "quality" means. Since 2016, we have supported the development, refinement and expanded use of [Together for Her Health](#) (Together), a digitized pregnancy care program that supports antenatal care coordination, tracking and risk assessment and provides educational content on what quality care should look like. Post-delivery, people use the digital platform to anonymously rate the quality of care they received. Feedback is made available to providers, prompting them to be responsive to the needs of their patients. Since implementation, facilities registered with Together show significant improvement on many quality of care indicators including increased ability to initiate skin-to-skin contact, early breastfeeding and counseling on postpartum and newborn danger signs.⁴

Collaborator: Avegen



Improving the Quality of Maternity Care

Digitally Enabling Safe Delivery

Health care providers, especially those working in rural or remote areas, often struggle to access quality, evidence-based information and up-to-date educational resources. The [Safe Delivery App](#) is a smartphone application that provides health care workers with instant access to current clinical guidelines on emergency obstetric and neonatal care in Hindi. The app also serves as a training tool for health care workers and has been especially valuable as a guide in remote areas. The Safe Delivery App is now being translated into additional local languages with support from Astar Urmika, a Karnataka-based maternal health organization, and UNICEF.

Collaborator: Maternity Foundation





Assuring Quality Private Maternity Care

Although private maternity care providers offer a large proportion of care, there had been no mechanism to assure the quality of this care. Since 2013, Merck for Mothers has supported **Manyata** — a quality certification for private maternity care providers based on a quality improvement model that significantly improves private providers' adherence to WHO-aligned quality standards. Led by the [Federation of Obstetric and Gynecological Societies of India \(FOGSI\)](#), Manyata supports quality improvement efforts among private providers in six states (Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka), where over 700 providers have achieved Manyata certification upon meeting quality standards. Manyata also prepares providers to apply for accreditation from the [National Accreditation Board for Hospitals & Healthcare Providers](#), which entitles them to become eligible for reimbursements from payors.

Providers certified via Manyata can access patient ratings and feedback of care through the Together platform, furthering the goal of patient-centered, quality care. To help accelerate scale-up, Manyata and collaborators are digitizing performance management systems — providing a more comprehensive understanding of the private maternity care sector's performance. Collaborators are also introducing a business model to make the certification program financially sustainable.

Collaborators: FOGSI, Jhpiego, Avalon, Ariadne Labs, PwC, Swasti-CMS, PharmAccess



Strengthening Integrated Approaches to Sustain High Quality Maternity Care

Unlocking Innovative Financing for Health

Funding solutions that allow innovation and experimentation are needed to solve critical public health challenges. **The Utkrisht Development Impact Bond** is a first-of-its-kind health financing mechanism developed in collaboration with [USAID](#) and [UBS Optimus Foundation](#). Utkrisht aims to reduce maternal and infant mortality and improve the quality of maternity care in private facilities in Rajasthan by leveraging private capital to cover the upfront costs of quality improvement. The initial capital is repaid to investors by outcome funders if certain quality targets are met.

This funding mechanism reduces the risk of investment in innovation and experimentation for outcome funders because they only pay for results. We are assessing whether and to what extent Utkrisht facilitates the delivery of high quality care, improves maternal health outcomes and is cost effective. If proven successful, this financial structure could serve as a blueprint for scaling quality improvement for maternity care across the country.

Collaborators: UBS Optimus Foundation, USAID, Palladium, PSI, Hindustan Latex Family Planning Promotion Trust, Mathematica

- 1 Government of India, Office of the Registrar General. (2020). Special Bulletin on Maternal Mortality in India 2016—18. Retrieved from https://censusindia.gov.in/vital_statistics/SRS_Bulletins/MMR%20Bulletin%202016-18.pdf
- 2 United Nations Population Fund. (2019). Trends in Maternal Mortality: 2000 - 2017. https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Maternal_mortality_report.pdf
- 3 International Institute for Population Science, & ICF. (2017). National Family Health Survey 4, 2015-2016: India. Retrieved from <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR339/FR339.pdf>
- 4 Saharan, S., Deo, V., (2020, February 2). Effect of a standardized and actionable feedback platform on Improving Quality of Care at Indian hospitals during delivery

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