

Press Release from Health & Family Welfare Department,
Government of Sikkim

Sikkim Holds First Stakeholder Meeting on Cancer Prevention, Early Detection, and Population-Based Cancer Screening for Breast, Stomach, Cervical, and Oral Cancers

2/09/2026: The Health & Family Welfare Department, Government of Sikkim, in partnership with the Department of Health Research (DHR), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), is implementing a comprehensive programme to strengthen cancer prevention, early detection, and population-based cancer screening for breast, stomach, cervical, and oral cancers through interventions across schools, colleges, and communities in the state.

The First Stakeholder Meeting for the implementation of the DHR–ICMR-supported Cancer Research Project in Sikkim, titled “Co-develop and Implementation of Cancer Screening in Sikkim: A Multi Model Approach for Early Detection of Gastrointestinal, Cervical, Breast and Oral Cancers in Sikkim,” was held on 1–2 September 2026 in Gangtok.

The stakeholder meeting was chaired by Shri G.T. Dhungel, Hon’ble Minister for Health & Family Welfare Department, in the august presence of Ms. Richa Khoda, Joint Secretary, Department of Health Research (DHR), Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India; Dr. Sandeep Tambe, IFS, Principal Secretary, Education Department; Shri Tshewang Gyachho, IAS, Secretary, Health & Family Welfare Department; and Dr. Nisha K.Jose, Scientist ‘F’ / OSC, ICMR Headquarters, New Delhi. The inaugural session was also attended by Senior Officers, Principal Directors, Directors, Mission Directors, Programme Officers from the Government of Sikkim, along with senior doctors and scientists from ICMR–NICPR Noida, BBCT Guwahati, IBSD Imphal, and DBT, Government of India, alongside administrative officials from collaborating departments, while the technical presentation was led by the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI) team.

The programme addresses key modifiable cancer risks—including tobacco, alcohol, poor diet, and physical inactivity—through integrated interventions tailored to Sikkim’s context. School and college modules will build cancer literacy and promote healthy lifestyle habits, while community mobilization through SHGs, ASHAs, and PRIs will focus primarily on detecting pre-cancerous lesions and early detection of priority cancers.

The initiative will also examine regional dietary and environmental exposures, generating evidence on potential carcinogenic compounds in cooked traditional foods alongside nutrition awareness. In support of this, the Let’s Fix Our Food (LFOF) Consortium—led by PHFI with ICMR–NIN and UNICEF—will extend to Sikkim’s schools and colleges to foster healthier institutional food environments adapted to the state’s distinctive food culture. Screening component of the programme will be done as population-based cancer screening to all the eligible population of the six districts of Sikkim through HPV SAMPLING, SELF-SAMPLING KITS, clinical-based screening and endoscopy screening.

Addressing the gathering, Hon’ble Minister for Health & Family Welfare, Shri G.T. Dhungel, stated that the state government under the leadership of the Hon’ble Chief Minister is deeply committed to prioritizing public health and disease prevention. He emphasized that curbing lifestyle diseases and cancer requires proactive intervention at the grassroots level, noting that instilling healthy habits in school children and strengthening community screening for priority cancers will safeguard future generations and build a healthier Sikkim.

Ms. Richa Khoda, Joint Secretary, DHR, highlighted the Department of Health Research’s perspective on translational research and innovation in cancer control, noting that Sikkim provides a pioneering ground to develop an adaptable, evidence-based model. She commended the state’s proactive leadership and assured sustained technical and research support from the Ministry to ensure the project translates into tangible public health benefits. Shri Tshewang Gyachho Bhutia, IAS, Secretary, Health & Family Welfare Department, outlined the implementation roadmap, stating that multi-sectoral convergence between the Health, Education, and Rural Development departments is paramount. He affirmed that frontline healthcare workers, ASHAs, and field teams will be fully mobilized and equipped to ensure early detection, timely referral, and maximum coverage across all targeted blocks. Speaking on behalf of the technical consortium, Prof. Monika Arora, Vice President (Research and Health Promotion), Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), remarked, “Cancer prevention must begin early and be reinforced across schools, colleges and communities. By empowering young people to avoid tobacco and alcohol, eat healthy and remain physically active while strengthening awareness and access to early diagnosis, we can substantially reduce the future cancer burden in Sikkim. I am delighted that the national ‘Let’s Fix Our Food’ intervention is being adopted by the Government of Sikkim for statewide implementation, empowering children and adolescents to champion healthy eating and active living and influence healthier choices within their families and communities. Together, these efforts can position Sikkim as a model for integrated cancer and NCD prevention.”

The stakeholder meeting concluded with dedicated working sessions focused on strengthening inter-sectoral coordination, defining roles and responsibilities of participating sites, and developing site-specific implementation

plans and timelines, with particular focus on selected blocks. The programme will assess changes in cancer-related knowledge, attitudes and practices, modifiable risk behaviours, uptake of screening and early detection, and implementation outcomes to inform future scale-up, marking an important step towards strengthening prevention-oriented cancer control in Sikkim and developing a sustainable model for the country