

PRESS RELEASE



Meghalaya Sets Milestone with Tobacco-Free Villages program - 264 VHCs complied

Subhead: NHM–MSRLS program activates 1,030 VHCs in Year 1 across East Khasi Hills & West Jaintia Hills; MoHFW & WHO laud the Meghalaya model

Shillong, September 11, 2025: Meghalaya has achieved a national first in community-led tobacco control, with 264 Village Health Councils (VHCs) complying with the criteria of the Tobacco-Free Villages (TfV) program. Implemented across two pilot districts - East Khasi Hills and West Jaintia Hills, the initiative is a National Health Mission (NHM), Meghalaya program in collaboration with the Meghalaya State Rural Livelihoods Society (MSRLS) and implementation partner Sambandh Health Foundation (SHF). In the first year, 1,030 VHCs participated in the TfV program.

The Meghalaya Tobacco-Free Village Program, designed by NHM-Meghalaya and SHF in February 2024, consists of six annual activities to be undertaken by each VHC. The “Meghalaya Model” draws on recognized global frameworks—WHO FCTC Articles 8, 12, 14, and 16, CDC Best Practices for Comprehensive tobacco control, and established behaviour-change theories (Nudge Theory, Social Norms Theory, Health Belief Model). It informed the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare’s “Standard Operating Procedures for Villages to be Tobacco-Free” which was issued later - in October 2024.



Every year, an estimated 8,000 people in Meghalaya die due to tobacco use. Launched in May 2024 following an MoU between NHM Meghalaya and SHF, the TfV program mobilizes VHCs to appoint TfV Nodals who get community resolutions passed & conduct awareness drives. In early 2025, implementation was further strengthened by engaging the Community Gender & Health Activists (CGHAs), a village cadre of the MSRLS, deepening last-mile reach in the two districts.

Senior official from the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Dr. L. Swasticharan (DDG & Director, Emergency Medical Relief) and Dr. Ankita Piplani (WHO Consultant, New Delhi), visited multiple villages and said they were “impressed by the outcomes”, commending the community-driven model. They were shown around by Dr. Nabaneeta Mawrie (State Nodal Officer, NTCP), Dr. Bibiana (District Nodal Officer), Mr. Marbud (State Consultant) and the SHF team.



What is TfV & how does a VHC become Tobacco-Free?

The TfV program empowers VHCs to make their villages tobacco-free by: (i) appointing a TfV Nodal (CGHA/VHC member) (ii) Holding meetings to discuss and raise awareness with villagers (iii) A joint declaration signed by the VHC Chairperson and school principals affirming no sale of tobacco near schools. (iv) orders for No-Smoking in public places (v) installing signage/IEC in public places. (vi) running awareness drives in the community. A village is declared Tobacco-Free after completing 5 of 6 prescribed activities with verified compliance.

Community voices:

- “Before TfV, people smoked freely in homes and near their children, but now, we proudly say they don’t smoke in homes anymore.”
- “After TfV, smoking in public places has drastically reduced.”
- “This program has given our youth and children a safer environment.”
- “I’m grateful to the Health officials for the TFV program. Because of it, my spouse has proudly quit tobacco.”

Dr. Nabaneeta Mawrie (SNO, NTCP) said: “With 264 Tobacco-Free VHCs, Meghalaya is setting a national benchmark for community-owned public health.”

Abhishek Sunar, TfV Project head, SHF said “This success belongs to village leaders and nodals who turned resolutions into reality for the health of their villages”

As Year 2 begins (September 2025), NHM and SHF will scale the model to more villages, sustain compliance, and further reduce tobacco harm across the state.