Every child deserves to have a healthy start in life, and every mother access to quality healthcare during pregnancy and birth...
Poor health outcomes in expectant mothers and newborns are preventable.

Social and cultural barriers are more common in slums where health services are not reachable. Skilled birth attendants do not reach those who need them most. Most maternal deaths can be prevented if women have access to basic medical care during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period. Anaemia is the underlying cause for poor health outcomes and death across the slums. Anaemia in children leads to the impairment of their cognitive development. Across Delhi slums, there is no history of postnatal check-up in any mother after home delivery.

Asha has had a maternal and newborn health program since 1988 and is now working in 91 slums. The program entails the regular examination of would-be mothers and educating them on nutrition, personal hygiene, breastfeeding, and family planning. They are also given supplements such as iron, folic acid, and calcium during pregnancy. The high-risk cases are encouraged to register in the nearby government hospitals to ensure safe delivery.

Pregnant mothers are encouraged to have deliveries at certified healthcare facilities or home births attended by trained nurse-midwives. Asha staff and CHVs identify and intercede when local quacks (unregistered medical practitioners) who use injection oxytocin to speed up labour, attempt to provide potentially dangerous services to women in labour. The expectant mothers are provided with birth kits in the last trimester of pregnancy to ensure safe deliveries by trained birth attendants. The Asha team conducts regular postnatal check-up visits up to six weeks after birth. They also ensure that the newborn is breastfed within 6 hours of delivery.
Reena’s story

Reena and her husband Mukesh are residents of Zakhira slum colony. They were married for more than eight years but did not have a baby. They came to the Asha centre for treatment and were immediately referred to Asha Polyclinic and Diagnostic Centre. The doctor after conducting some tests, diagnosed that Reena had thyroid malfunction and started her treatment. After a few months of treatment, Reena conceived. The Asha team began providing Antenatal care, and the Community Health Volunteer (CHV) made regular home visits to monitor her health and advise her dietary supplements along with iron, folic acid and calcium. Reena had a high-risk pregnancy due to her medical complications. The CHV accompanied her to the nearest government hospital to register for delivery.

When Reena completed her gestation period, her family insisted on a home delivery because of the ongoing Covid-19 crisis. However, the Asha team explained the complications of her pregnancy to the family and got her admitted to a public hospital. The doctor diagnosed that the umbilical cord was entangled around the neck which is medically referred as Nuchal cord. After a successful caesarean operation, Reena delivered a baby girl weighing 2.7 kg. After delivery, adequate postnatal care was taken, first at the hospital and then by the Asha team at her home. Both the mother and daughter are healthy and progressing well.

Asha wants to expand similar programs to other slum communities of Delhi. With the absence of Maternal and Newborn health programs, about 55% women in the slums receive three Antenatal check-ups in a Government or Private facility and around 19% women get delivery done by skilled birth attendants. Only 58% women in the slums have taken a complete dose of iron and folic acid. The birth attendants, in more than 85% of mothers, do not take aseptic precautions during delivery and only about 40% of infants receive breast feeding within one hour of birth. Amongst the urban poor women, about 58% have some form of anaemia.
Asha’s Impact

- 100% pregnant women across Asha’s slums undergo mandatory 3 Antenatal check-ups.
- All pregnant women in Asha-supported slums receive basic laboratory investigations.
- All pregnant women receive two doses of tetanus toxoid vaccination to immunize both the expectant mother and her child, preventing neonatal tetanus.
- 99% of deliveries are either done in hospitals or by trained birth attendants.
- No maternal deaths were reported in the last 5 years.
- All pregnant and new mothers are given supplements such as iron, folic acid, and calcium to prevent anaemia and other deficiencies.
- Less than 5% of newborns in Asha slums have low birth weight (i.e. <2.5kgs).
- 99% of newborns are breastfed within the first six hours of their birth.
- 99% of children between the ages of 0-1 years receive BCG vaccination for tuberculosis prevention.
- Neonatal Mortality Rate in Asha slums is only 11 per 1000 live births in comparison to 23 per 1000 live births in India as a whole.
You can help by supporting

- antenatal and postnatal care to pregnant women
- pregnant mothers to have deliveries at certified healthcare facilities or home births attended by trained nurse midwives
- free birth kits in the last trimester to expectant mothers
- vaccination of pregnant women and newborns
- supplements for pregnant and new mothers
- training of Asha community health volunteers
Regular monitoring of pregnant women and newborns can guide interventions that are essential for favorable health outcomes.

Give AUD 700 to train 10 Asha community health workers or 10 birth attendants. You could fund this by making a regular monthly gift throughout the year.

Give AUD 420 to fund antenatal and postnatal care to a woman.

Give AUD 70 to provide free birth kits to 5 expectant mothers.

Give AUD 40 to provide vitamin, iron, and folic acid supplements to an expectant or new mother.

Contact: Richard Leder, National Coordinator, Australian Friends of Asha for Slums Limited (AFOA)
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To donate online go to:
www.australianfriendsofashaslums.org.au

To donate by cheque: Make a cheque payable to “Australian Friends of Asha for Slums Limited” and mail to:

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