

## PRESS RELEASE



### **Tobacco-Free Village Programme Strengthens Community-Led Tobacco Control in Meghalaya**

*531 VHCs Achieve Tobacco-Free Status*

**Shillong, September 10, 2026:** The Tobacco-Free Village (TfV) Programme, initiated in 2024 in two districts East Khasi Hills and West Jaintia Hills by the National Health Mission (NHM), Meghalaya, in collaboration with the Meghalaya State Rural Livelihoods Society (MSRLS) and Sambandh Health Foundation (SHF) as the implementation partner, has strengthened its position as a national leader in community-led tobacco control for a second consecutive year.

As Dr. Nabaneeta D. Mawrie, SNO, NTCP, NHM Meghalaya, put it, “The Tobacco-Free Village programme is not about declaring villages tobacco-free on paper; it is about communities taking action. The model subsequently informed the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare’s Standard Operating Procedures for Villages to be Tobacco-Free. In the 1st Year, 264 VHCs (20%) out of 1,295 Village Health Councils (VHCs) across East Khasi Hills and West Jaintia Hills met the criteria to become Tobacco-Free. In Year 2, this number more than doubled, with 531 VHCs (41%) meeting the criteria to become Tobacco-Free — while 1,039 VHCs are now actively implementing the Programme across the two districts.”



With tobacco contributing to an estimated 8,000 deaths annually in Meghalaya, the growing reach of village-level prevention is an important public-health achievement. During Year 2, more than 5,500 on-ground anti-tobacco activities were conducted, engaging more than 55,000 community members. Tobacco-related health issues and ways to prevent tobacco use are increasingly being discussed through VHC meetings, Self-Help

Group meetings and community gatherings, reflecting growing community ownership of tobacco control in villages.

A key strength of the Meghalaya model is that Tobacco-Free village title is achieved through community action and verified compliance, rather than simply through a declaration. VHCs appoint a TfV Nodal Officer, conduct tobacco-awareness discussions and community meetings, pass resolutions to restrict tobacco sale near schools, issue no-smoking orders for public places, install anti-tobacco signage, posters and conduct community awareness drives.

These actions are documented and verified, and a VHC is recognised as Tobacco-Free after successfully completing and verifying at least five of the six prescribed activities. During the first year, senior officials from the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare and WHO visited participating villages and commended the community-driven model.

The impact is visible on the ground. The VHC Chairperson of Mawmluh VHC, Shella Block shared that around 40–50% of villagers have stopped smoking or using tobacco in public places such as tea shops, bus stands and social gatherings, while about 60-70% have stopped smoking inside their homes, particularly around infants and young children. VHC TfV Nodals, working with school authorities, are also ensuring no sale of cigarettes or tobacco products near schools. According to the Chairperson, the programme has brought about increased awareness, reduced tobacco use and positive behavioural change in the community.

The second year has also strengthened last-mile community mobilisation through VHCs, TfV Nodal Officers and Community Gender & Health Activists (CGHAs) of the Meghalaya State Rural Livelihoods Society (MSRLS). As Mr. Ronald Kynta, COO, MSRLS, said, MSRLS staff “have used their deep trust and reach within communities — built through Village Organisation, SHGs and VHCs — to carry tobacco prevention into homes and everyday conversations, making healthier practices a shared community goal.” Three best-performing VHCs were recognised by the Government of Meghalaya at the State Level Observation of World No Tobacco Day, 2026, in Shillong, each receiving a Certificate of Appreciation and cash award.



The program is being run through Sambandh Health Foundation’s unique digital programme implementation (DPI) methodology. Mr. Kynta added that the programme shows what community institutions can achieve when they are backed by dedicated people on the ground.

Year 3 of the Tobacco-Free Village Programme began on 1st September 2026 — and Meghalaya is not slowing down. In just

two years, a state known with 47% tobacco users is turning its villages into the frontline of the fight against it. Community by community, home by home, Meghalaya is proving that tobacco-free living is not a distant goal but a reality being built right now — and setting the benchmark for the rest of India to follow.

**For any query contact:**

**Dr. Nabaneeta D. Mawrie**

**State Nodal Officer**

**NTCP- NHM, Meghalaya**

**Email: nmawrie17@gmail.com**