



## PRESS RELEASE



### Meghalaya leads India: 86% of Schools Achieve Tobacco-Free Status

**Shillong March 20, 2026:** In a landmark public health and education achievement, Meghalaya has become the first state in India where 86% of schools have been certified as Tobacco Free Educational Institutions (ToFEI) the highest percentage recorded nationwide. This milestone is crucial as the state records nearly 8,000 tobacco-related deaths every year and 47% of adults aged 15+ consume tobacco in some form, according to the Global Adult Tobacco Survey (2017). Recognizing that prevention must begin early, the Government of Meghalaya initiated the Tobacco Free Educational Institutions (ToFEI) programme three years ago under the National Health Mission. The programme is being implemented by the Department of Health in collaboration with the Department of Education and Sambandh Health Foundation, with the goal of ensuring that all schools across the state become tobacco free.



Under ToFEI guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, schools are required to complete nine annual anti-tobacco activities forming a 100-mark scorecard. To be certified as a Tobacco Free Educational Institution, a school must secure a minimum of 80 marks. These activities include anti-tobacco signage's within premises, awareness campaigns, rallies by students and strict compliance with tobacco control norms making school a safe campus from addiction for students. Every year, nearly 10,000 schools across Meghalaya actively participate in anti-tobacco rallies, signature campaigns and awareness drives, creating a state-wide environment that discourages children from falling prey to addictive tobacco products.

This achievement reflects strong leadership and coordinated action by the Government of Meghalaya - particularly the Departments of Health and Education - along with district, block and cluster-level officials who ensured systematic monitoring, verification and accountability. The state has adopted Sambandh Health Foundation's Digital Program Implementation methodology to implement this program.

Achieving 86% Tobacco Free Schools is not merely an administrative milestone; it is a powerful public health victory for our children," said Smt. Jennyfer Jones Synrem, State ToFEI Nodal Officer, Meghalaya. "This milestone brings us closer to our shared vision of 'My Meghalaya, *Tobacco-Free* Meghalaya.' When governance systems, schools and communities align with clarity and commitment, transformative outcomes are possible.



Echoing this sentiment, Dr. Nabaneeta D Mawrie, State Nodal Officer National Tobacco Control Program, Department of Health, Government of Meghalaya, stated, "34% children aged 13 to 15 years consume tobacco in some or the other form as per the Global Youth Tobacco Survey. Schools shape lifelong behaviours. By institutionalizing tobacco prevention within our education system, we are creating safer learning environments and protecting future generations from addiction and tobacco-related diseases. Programs implemented at this scale will generate long-term health benefits for the entire state."

The initiative has mobilized school leaders, teachers, students and communities to actively safeguard children from tobacco exposure and promote healthier school environments.

This achievement sets a new national benchmark and demonstrates what is possible when governance systems, schools and communities work together with shared purpose and accountability.