

## Responding To The COVID-19 Crisis In India



Photo: CASA, India

*In India, COVID-19 infection rates are rising exponentially and the health system is collapsing under the burden. Hospitals in urban centers are overcrowded and often turn people away. Supplies, including oxygen, are running low, and various strains of the virus more frequently require that patients be treated with oxygen. Families that already struggled to meet basic needs have become even more vulnerable to*

*hunger and other challenges. Grief, anxiety, and depression are common across the population. With partial lockdown in place in many states and full lockdown in others, migrant guest workers are returning to their native villages. In addition to the economic impact of the loss of work, the influx into the villages may contribute to the spread of COVID-19 in rural areas. Week of Compassion is responding, supporting our partners as they work to meet the urgent needs of this new wave and prevent the further spread of disease; while also looking ahead to long-term needs and planning for the future.*

Week of Compassion partners CASA (Church's Auxiliary for Social Action) in India have long-established relationships throughout the region. In this critical moment, those existing connections and the trust earned over decades provide a foundation on which to build a comprehensive response.

Just this week, India has confirmed as many as 357,000 new infections in a single day—the highest single-day count for any country on any day since the pandemic began—with as many as 3,300 daily deaths. In total, the country has reported more than 17.6 million cases since the pandemic began last year. But health workers in India indicate that COVID-19 cases are significantly underreported, and that the real number of cases could be up to 30 times higher.

While the situation is urgent, our partners are approaching the response with both immediate and long range needs in mind. That means meeting critical needs right

now—like food, hygiene supplies, and cash grants to help with medical or other expenses—while also focusing on building capacity for community-owned responses down the road. Communications are targeted to help local leadership understand the virus and adopt precautionary measures like frequent hand washing, social distancing, and wearing masks. When those efforts are localized, they are far more effective. “Even in the short term, we will take the long-term approach and make sure that the community-owned response is there,” says Joseph Sahayam, Additional Emergency Officer, Headquarters, of CASA. Once vaccines are widely available, strong local leadership will be especially crucial in sharing accurate information about vaccination processes and distribution.

So far, CASA’s distribution of informational materials and other support has reached around 63,000 families in 832 villages; an overall impact of around 2,700,000 people in around 6000 villages. That reach continues to grow as our partners ramp up efforts around food security and livelihood supports. Special emphasis is placed on supporting returning migrant workers and vulnerable populations including minorities, widows, the physically challenged, transgender people, single female-headed households, and children.

“The situation is getting worse,” says Sahayam, “we need to respond immediately. And the peak is yet to come. We pray that things don’t worsen.” Week of Compassion will continue to respond to the situation through our network of partners in places that are affected by COVID-19, including the current crisis in India.

Week of Compassion invites you to add your prayers to those of our partners as they work to meet urgent needs amid unthinkable challenges. With your help, efforts to curb the spread of disease while also providing relief to the most vulnerable will continue to have a significant impact on many lives.

*To contribute to this life-saving response, designate your gift for “COVID-19 Relief” by [mail](#), [online](#), or by texting **WoC** to **41444**.*





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