A new health initiative ‘Rashtriy Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK)’ was launched by Chairperson of National Advisory Council, Sonia Gandhi, at Palghar in Thane district, Maharashtra, on February 6.

The initiative, under the National Rural Health Mission, aims to provide comprehensive healthcare and improve the quality of life of children through early detection of birth defects, diseases, deficiencies, development delays including disability.

Launching the programme, Gandhi said the government was committed to achieving the objective of “Health for All” through accessible, affordable and equitable healthcare services. “Children are the future of this country and their welfare is our prime concern. The health of children is directly linked to the well-being of the mother, for which the central and state governments have taken several measures,” she added.

Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare Ghulam Nabi Azad and Maharashtra Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan were present at the launch function.

Under RBSK, the government has assured a package of health services for all children up to the age of 18. The scheme has been launched in Palghar and is set to extend across the country, in different phases.

Children will, under the scheme, be screened for 30 common ailments and conditions, so that there is the possibility of early medical intervention, in case there is such need. Birth defects like Down’s syndrome, congenital cataract, deafness and heart defect, deficiency conditions like anaemia, malnutrition and gastro, developmental delays and disabilities like hearing impairment and vision impairment are among the conditions for which children will be screened under this scheme.

All children in the 0-6 age range enrolled in anganwadi would be screened at least once a year; all children in government schools and in schools aided by the government would also be regularly screened for the conditions.

A tribute to the Mahatma...

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar unveiled a 70-feet statue of Mahatma Gandhi, the world’s tallest, at Gandhi Maidan in Patna on February 15. Built by Delhi-based sculptor Ramjattan and Sons, the statue includes a 30-feet-high pedestal.

The Chief Minister said the Mahatma’s message of non-violence would continue to inspire people to seek justice in a peaceful manner. “The tallest leader of our country and flag bearer of world peace will continue to inspire youths for generations,” he said after unveiling the statue at a function.

Plaques quoting his thoughts and descriptions of various movements that the Mahatma led during the freedom struggle were added to the statue.

Sikkim shows the way

Sikkim is the second-smallest state in India in terms of area after Goa. It is also the least populated in the country with just 600,000 people. Yet, in some matters, this Himalayan state towers over others, leading the way where the rest of India faltered.

Among the most innovative schemes undertaken in this state is the Comprehensive Annual and Total Check-up for Healthy (CATCH) Sikkim. This programme is aimed at tracking the health status of people in the state, so prevention, rather than cure, can become the order of the day when it comes to public health.

Launched in August 2010, CATCH covered 50 percent of the state’s population by the end of 2012.

CATCH is aimed at prevention rather than cure, a cheaper and more effective way to address the healthcare needs of a population than providing for expensive treatment once disease sets in.

The aim of CATCH is to ensure a comprehensive check-up on an annual and periodical basis to all people in the state. A database of the health status of individuals would be maintained. Check-ups and healthcare under this programme are provided free of charge.

At the time of launching the programme, Chief Minister Pawan Chamling, said: “Our aim is to provide community-based comprehensive annual check-ups and care, free of charge. We will bring healthcare to the doorsteps of the people and make Sikkim the healthiest state.”

The Political and Economic Journal of Sikkim reports that the primary focus of the scheme is to get an annual health check-up done for all citizens. After that, comprehensive care based on the history of the patient would be provided.

Ramesh Dahal, a resident from Yangang, told the journal: “This is a good initiative for those who are poor and cannot afford treatment. In a recently concluded CATCH health check-up camp, the doctors checked my sugar and blood pressure. I was advised what to eat and how to lead a healthy lifestyle. It was extremely informative for the villagers.”