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ICMR-Gates Foundation Launch Anaemia Grand Challenge

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WHY IN NEWS

On **June 13, 2026**, the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** and the **Gates Foundation** launched a **Grand Challenge** in New Delhi, offering grants of **up to Rs 1 crore** for affordable, iron-rich food-based prototypes to combat **anaemia**. The challenge targets adolescent girls and women of reproductive age, among whom anaemia remains stubbornly widespread.

THE CHALLENGE IN BRIEF

DETAIL	PARTICULARS
Partners	ICMR and the Gates Foundation
Grant	Up to Rs 1 crore per prototype
Development window	One year
Application deadline	July 3, 2026
Open to	Researchers, startups, food companies, NGOs
Goal	Affordable, iron-rich food solutions, beyond supplementation

The initiative deliberately shifts the focus from conventional **iron-folic-acid supplementation** toward **food-based** approaches that can be woven into everyday diets, an important pivot in how India tackles micronutrient deficiency.

THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

INDICATOR	DETAIL
Anaemia among women of reproductive age	Nearly 1 in 2 (about 50 percent)
Adolescent girls	Comparably high prevalence
Consequences	Fatigue, reduced work capacity, poor pregnancy outcomes, low birth weight, impaired child development

Anaemia is both a health and an economic burden, sapping productivity and entrenching an intergenerational cycle of poor maternal and child health.

WHERE IT FITS IN INDIA'S STRATEGY

The challenge complements, rather than replaces, India's existing anaemia and nutrition architecture.

PROGRAMME	ROLE
Anaemia Mukht Bharat (AMB)	The national strategy using the "6x6x6" framework (six interventions, six target groups, six institutional mechanisms)
POSHAN Abhiyaan	The overarching nutrition mission targeting stunting, wasting, low birth weight and anaemia
Weekly Iron-Folic-Acid Supplementation (WIFS)	Supplementation for adolescents
Food fortification	Fortified rice, salt and edible oil to deliver micronutrients at scale

THE ANALYSIS: FROM PILLS TO PLATES

- The limits of supplementation.** Despite years of iron-folic-acid programmes, anaemia prevalence has proven hard to move, partly because of adherence, absorption and the multiple causes of anaemia (not only iron deficiency, but also other micronutrient gaps, infections and genetic disorders such as thalassaemia).
- Food systems as the next frontier.** Building iron into affordable, palatable everyday foods can reach people more reliably than a daily pill, which is why the challenge targets food prototypes.

- 3 **Public-private partnership in health innovation.** Pairing a public research body (ICMR) with a global philanthropy (Gates Foundation) and inviting startups and food companies reflects a model of crowdsourced, market-linked health innovation, with the state setting the goal and the private and research sectors competing on solutions.

The way forward is to ensure that winning prototypes are not only effective but **affordable and scalable** through existing delivery channels such as the Public Distribution System, mid-day meals and Anganwadi supplementary nutrition, so that innovation reaches the women who need it most.

UPSC RELEVANCE

- **GS Paper 2 (Governance and Health):** government interventions in health, public-private partnerships, nutrition schemes.
- **GS Paper 3 (Science and Technology):** food technology, biofortification, health innovation.
- **Prelims:** the ICMR-Gates challenge, Anaemia Mukht Bharat's 6x6x6 framework, anaemia prevalence figures.
- **Mains:** the gender dimension of malnutrition and the shift from supplementation to food-systems interventions.

FACTS CORNER

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THE CHALLENGE:

ICMR and Gates Foundation; grants up to Rs 1 crore; applications until July 3, 2026

Goal: affordable iron-rich food prototypes against anaemia

THE BURDEN:

Anaemia affects about 50 percent (1 in 2) of women of reproductive age in India

Causes: iron and other micronutrient deficiency, infections, genetic disorders

INDIA'S STRATEGY:

Anaemia Mukht Bharat: 6x6x6 framework (six interventions, six target groups, six mechanisms)

POSHAN Abhiyaan; Weekly Iron-Folic-Acid Supplementation; food fortification (rice, salt, oil)

BODY IN FOCUS:

ICMR is India's apex biomedical research body, under the Department of Health Research

Sources: ICMR, PIB

Source: ICMR-Gates Foundation Launch Anaemia Grand Challenge — Ujiyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs

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