# Executive Summary

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This Performance & Compliance Audit Report contains one performance audit on '*Swasthya Sathi* Scheme' and one compliance audit paragraph on 'Availability of an inclusive and accessible environment in Educational Institutions for Persons with Disabilities/ Children with Special Needs'.

### Chapter 1: Performance Audit on *Swasthya Sathi* Scheme

The Government of West Bengal (GoWB) rolled out (February 2017) a comprehensive group health insurance scheme called the *"Swasthya Sathi"* for providing protection to beneficiaries from financially debilitating effects of illnesses. The Scheme was implemented by the Health and Family Welfare (H&FW) Department, GoWB. To implement the Scheme, the *Swasthya Sathi Samiti* (SS *Samiti*), a registered Society, was set up by the GoWB to act as the State Nodal Agency (SNA).

The Scheme initially covered only volunteers and other contractual workers and then it was expanded to include all permanent residents of the State (except those already covered by any other Government health insurance/ assurance scheme). The mode of implementation was initially through a hybrid mode (both insurance and assurance), which was shifted entirely to assurance mode only.

This Performance Audit (PA) of the *Swasthya Sathi* Scheme (SS Scheme) was taken up to cover the period from 2018-19 to 2022-23 wherein an amount of ₹ 6,882.06 crore was expended under the Scheme.

Significant audit observations that emerged from the audit were as follows:

- Neither any comprehensive guidelines nor any Annual Action Plans for achieving the programme objectives were prepared by the SNA as of July 2024.

***(Paragraph 1.8.1.1)***

- The number of families enrolled under the Scheme (as of March 2023) was around 10 *per cent* higher than the number of families holding Ration Cards in the State, as per the Public Distribution System (PDS) records (of August 2023). Consequently, the risk of benefits of the Scheme getting passed on to ineligible beneficiaries, in deviation of norms, could not be ruled out.

***{Paragraph 1.8.1.2 (i)}***

- The SNA issued instructions to district authorities (October 2021), to collect Aadhaar numbers and update the same in the SS website. However, there was non-completion of the linking process which would not only lead to non-compliance with Scheme verification protocols, but also impede the intended objective of eradicating multiple enrolments of the same beneficiary under the SS Scheme.

***{Paragraph 1.8.1.2 (iii)}***

- Test-check of records of 50 private empanelled hospitals showed that 31 hospitals were improperly allowed higher grading *vis-à-vis* available infrastructure, services being offered, sanctioned bed strength of hospitals *etc.* Due to improper gradation, these Health Care Providers (HCPs) though entitled to lower package rates as per applicable norms of the SS Scheme were being paid at higher rates. Consequently such anomalies resulted in excess payment of ₹ 14.48 crore to these HCPs.

***Paragraph 1.8.1.3 (ii)***

- As against 3,038 HCPs to be empanelled to service 2.43 crore beneficiary families, only 2,605 HCPs were empanelled for the State as a whole, limiting the choice of hospitals and impacting service delivery for enrolled beneficiaries.

***{Paragraph 1.8.1.4 (i)}***

- During the period April 2018 and July 2022, 3,955 claims valued at ₹ 7.26 crore were not paid to the HCPs by five Insurance Companies (ICs). Reasons for such non-payment by ICs were not available in records. Further, despite the existence of penal provisions in the Agreements, the SNA did not recover penalty of ₹ 31.33 crore from three ICs for delayed settlement of claims.

***{Paragraph 1.8.1.5 (ii) (A) and (iii)}***

- National Insurance Company and Bajaj Allianz General Insurance Company had not refunded ₹ 9.78 crore to the SNA for failing to reach the mandated claim ratio as per Agreements.

***{Paragraph 1.8.1.5 (iv)}***

- There was excess expenditure of ₹ 46.97 crore on enrolment and distribution of smart cards to 1.65 crore families by Third Party Administrators (TPAs)/ Implementation Support Agencies (ISAs).

***(Paragraph 1.8.1.6)***

- Out of joint review of 65 empanelled private HCPs in test-checked six districts, shortage of Resident Medical Officers and nursing staff was noticed in 32 and 36 HCPs respectively. Further, there was no system of providing free Outpatient Department (OPD) consultation to SS beneficiaries in any of the 65 test-checked HCPs. In 16 test-checked HCPs, it was seen that Emergency wards did not have adequate/ appropriate equipment or facilities such as defibrillator, ventilator, infusion pump *etc.*

***(Paragraph 1.8.3.1)***

- In-Patients' survey involving 399 in-patients in test-checked HCPs of six test-checked districts revealed that 141 in-patients had paid consultation fees ranging between ₹ 70 and ₹ 700, whereas 112 in-patients had to bear costs ranging between ₹ 250 and ₹ 20,000 for diagnostic tests. This was in contravention of the provisions of the Scheme which envisaged cashless treatment.

***(Paragraph 1.8.3.2)***

- Budgetary support for implementing the Scheme was not adequate, due to which the SNA had to pay ₹ 10.85 crore as interest on loans (₹ 721.95 crore) availed to implement the Scheme during 2020-22. Non-implementation of Ayushman Bharat – *Swasthya Sathi* (AB-SS) deprived the State's population especially migrant ones (who move to other States in India) of the benefit of accessing cashless health care services in a network of hospitals across the country. Thereby, GoWB could not avail the central funding to supplement the State's expenditure on the *Swasthya Sathi* Scheme and residents of the State were denied benefits under AB-SS.

***(Paragraphs 1.9.2 and 1.9.3)***

- Audit noted that six test-checked districts furnished Utilisation Certificates (UCs) amounting to ₹ 15.43 crore to the SNA without obtaining UCs from sub-allottees, who were responsible for actual expenditure. This practice entailed the risk of mis-utilisation of allotted funds.

***(Paragraph 1.10.2.1)***

- In selected six districts, no information/ documentation was available to indicate/ corroborate whether beneficiary audits had been conducted by the ICs during the period covered under audit (2018-19 to 2022-23). Due to non-conduct of such audits, the performance of HCPs from the perspective of the beneficiaries remained unassessed.

***(Paragraph 1.11.1)***

- Post Discharge Medical Audit (PDMA) was not conducted till January 2023. During PDMAs conducted between February to March 2023, penalties amounting to ₹ 11.78 crore were imposed by the SNA on the HCPs, out of which ₹ 8.36 crore only was realised.

***(Paragraph 1.11.2)***

- SNA could not finalize the creation and recruitments of 245 contractual posts which were required to ensure hassle free enrolment of beneficiaries, empanelment as well as monitoring of hospitals, conduct Medical Audit *etc.* These posts *inter alia* included medical officers, accountants, data entry operators *etc.* This resulted in lack of proper monitoring, delay in making payment to HCPs and inadequate Medical Audits.

***(Paragraph 1.11.4)***

- Grievances lodged were neither auto populated in the SNA portal, nor were these acknowledged by the SNA. No mechanism to track the redressal of grievances was seen available in the SNA portal. No timeline and escalation mechanism had been prescribed for the settlement of grievances. Auto Short Message Service (SMS) alerts were not sent to the complainant either at the time of submission of grievance or at the time of its disposal.

***(Paragraph 1.11.5)***

***Recommendations:***

***1.1 The State Government may take steps to expeditiously frame comprehensive guidelines for the Scheme as well as prepare Annual Action Plans to ensure planned/ systematic implementation of the SS Scheme.***

***1.2 The SNA may consider integrating the SS database with other databases related to Government schemes to ensure sanctity/ authenticity of beneficiaries and put in place a validation control mechanism to increase the reliability of data. Clear guidelines need to be issued by the H&FW Department to the SNA to carefully verify family details, residency status etc., at the time of enrolment.***

***1.3 The State Government may ensure that grading of empanelled HCPs is awarded by the SNA after proper inspections duly taking into consideration availability of infrastructure, manpower and services at the HCPs.***

***1.4 The Government may ensure that the SNA undertakes recoveries to be effected from ICs, in a timely manner.***

***1.5 The Government may ensure that the SNA exercises due diligence in monitoring & control over TPAs to ensure that the latter deliver services to beneficiaries as per the Scheme objectives and in line with the terms and conditions of applicable Agreements.***

***1.6 The State Government may ensure that the SNA and the district authorities carry out periodic inspections and closely monitor HCPs to ensure that standards of infrastructure, facilities/ amenities and personnel in the empanelled hospitals are maintained as per terms and conditions of applicable Agreements.***

***1.7 Based on the number of beneficiaries projected to be covered under the Scheme, the SNA should prepare a realistic budget to ensure fund availability and efficient financial management.***

***1.8 The State Government may consider introducing appropriate mechanism to ensure that funds are utilised only for sanctioned purposes and UCs are submitted strictly as per the extant Financial Rules.***

***1.9 The State Nodal Agency may ensure that PDMAs are regularly conducted by the Medical Audit team and based on results of this, required action is taken by the concerned authorities.***

***1.10 The State Government may expedite creation of required posts and subsequent process of recruitment/ posting of personnel at the district level for ensuring smooth implementation of the Scheme.***

**Chapter 2: Individual Paragraph of Compliance Audit on Availability of an inclusive and accessible environment in Educational Institutions for Persons with Disabilities/ Children with Special Needs**

The Constitution of India promulgates equality, freedom, justice and dignity for all individuals and mandates an inclusive society for all, including Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), with the right to education, work and public assistance for

people affected by disability. The legal enactments framed by the Central and the State Government, in adherence to the Constitutional requirement, aim to ensure equal access to education, employment, healthcare, and other essential services.

A Compliance Audit was undertaken to assess whether inclusive and accessible educational opportunities were ensured by the State Government/ local authorities to children/ persons suffering from disabilities.

Significant audit observations that emerged from the audit were as follows:

- Three to nineteen *per cent* of identified Children with Special Needs (CwSN), of age group between 6 and 18 years, remained deprived of regular education during the period from 2015-16 to 2022-23.

***(Paragraph 2.1.1.1)***

- Against the requirement to set up 6,335 Resource Centres/ Rooms in the State, at the level of Gram Panchayats (GPs) & wards, District Education Officers could construct only 1,799 Resource Centres/ Rooms upto March 2024, representing slow progress in the provision of this facility to CwSN.

***(Paragraph 2.1.1.2)***

- As per the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) for special teachers was stipulated as 10:1 and 15:1 for primary level and Upper Primary level respectively. However, against 1,35,796 CwSN enrolled in 35,658 Schools of the State, the number of Special Educators available was 1,112 only. This resulted in a shortage of 7,941 Special Educators in the State. Consequently, ratio between availability of Special Educators and CwSN ranged between 1:101 and 1:122, during the period 2015 to 2023.

***(Paragraph 2.1.1.3)***

- During the period 2015-23, as against a training target of 2,45,479 Teachers/ Special Educators over three courses, only 1,64,545 could be trained, leading to a shortfall of 33 *per cent.* Again, during 2020-21 to 2022-23 no training was imparted to the 384 existing teachers of the 70 Government sponsored special schools.

***(Paragraph 2.1.1.4)***

- Distribution of Braille textbooks, during the period from 2015-16 to 2022-23 was not in accordance with the actual number of visually impaired CwSN. As a result, a total of 5,652 such students (21 *per cent*) were deprived of Braille textbooks. Further, free textbooks with large prints were also to be provided to CwSN with low-vision. However, against 1,30,312 large print textbooks required to be distributed during the period from 2015-16 to 2022-23, it was noted that 37,998 (29 *per cent*) large print textbooks could not be distributed.

***(Paragraphs 2.1.1.5 and 2.1.1.6)***

- Accessibility for PwDs in Government Polytechnics and Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) in the State was not ensured. This not only impacted the objective of achieving universal accessibility for PwDs but also deprived them of the opportunity to lead their lives with full dignity and freedom, in a barrier free environment.

***(Paragraph 2.2.1.1)***

- Infrastructure like ramps, ramp with handrails for barrier free access and suitable toilets for CwSN could not be developed in 4,083 (*6 per cent*), 43,313 (68 *per cent*) and 43,778 (69 *per cent*) schools respectively in the State. As of March 2023, out of 70 Sponsored Special Schools, it was observed that ramp with handrails for barrier free access and suitable toilets for CwSN were not available in 17 and 32 Sponsored Special Schools respectively.

***(Paragraph 2.2.1.2)***

## Preface

This Performance & Compliance Audit Report for the period ended March 2023 has been prepared for submission to the Governor of West Bengal under Article 151(2) of the Constitution of India for being laid before the Legislative Assembly of West Bengal.

This Report contains significant results of Performance Audit on *Swasthya Sathi* Scheme and Compliance Audit on availability of an inclusive and accessible environment in Educational Institutions for Persons with Disabilities/ Children with Special Needs to assess the State's performance in achieving the objectives based on relevant Acts, Rules, Guidelines/ norms, Circulars *etc*., framed or issued by the Government of India and the Government of West Bengal.

The instances mentioned in this Report are those which came to notice in course of test audit of the *Swasthya Sathi* Scheme and educational institutions in the State of West Bengal for the period ended March 2023 as well as those which came to notice in earlier years, but could not be reported in the previous Audit Reports; instances relating to the period subsequent to 2022-23 have also been included wherever necessary.

The audit has been conducted in conformity with the Auditing Standards issued by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

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