

Despite COVID-19, Firozabad’s City Health Plan Keeps Client Volume Up at District Women’s Hospitals, UPHCs

While the world grapples with the negative impact of COVID-19 on other health programming achievements, Firozabad – one of the 20 cities supported by The Challenge Initiative for Healthy Cities (TCIHC) in India – has consistently demonstrated an upward trend in family planning usage indicators. Firozabad’s careful planning and tenacity allowed it to continue providing quality family planning services to its urban poor population during the pandemic.

One of the major challenges brought on by COVID-19 in Firozabad was that a number of urban primary healthcare centers (UPHCs) were converted into COVID-19 care centers. In addition, staff were reposted at COVID-19 care centers and hospitals, and [urban accredited social health activists \(ASHAs\)](#) were redirected to different locations for COVID-19 survey duty.

Despite the challenges, the Firozabad government did not waiver in its commitment to provide quality family planning services. Dr. Bhanu Pratap Singh, the Urban Nodal Officer in Firozabad, shared the steps that he and other city governance staff took under the leadership of the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) to ensure family planning remained available to the urban poor:

“With TCIHC’s coaching and mentoring support, Firozabad had taken a number of steps in 2018 and 2019 to prioritize the family planning program. We reaped benefits from those exercises at the time of COVID.”

– Dr. Bhanu Pratap Singh
Urban Nodal Officer
Firozabad, Uttar Pradesh

He listed as examples:

- Monthly [fixed-day static \(FDS\) services](#) for permanent methods at district women’s hospitals (DWHs) as a result of TCIHC advocacy efforts
- District facilities conducting [whole site orientations](#) with TCIHC’s support



- A [city health plan \(CHP\)](#) completed at the end of 2019, under the chairmanship of the District Magistrate and with TCIHC support
- Budget for holding quarterly review meetings already included in the [program implementation plan \(PIP\)](#)

Dr. Singh said they were just beginning to implement their city health plan when COVID-19 struck in March 2020 and lockdowns were imposed.

By late June, Dr. Singh said Firozabad once again began monitoring progress at quarterly review meetings and the DWH’s Chief Medical Superintendent (CMS) noticed family planning indicators dipping. FDS days at DWHs had been limited to two days a week, but a decision was made to offer family planning services at DWHs every day from 8:30am-1pm during COVID. Another challenge they faced was making sure every patient was tested for COVID before service delivery.

With COVID as the city’s top health priority, Firozabad decided to reorient 92% of its urban ASHAs in June 2020 with TCIHC’s technical assistance. The reorientation focused on how to approach family planning solutions while keeping COVID in mind. It also covered how to process orders through the Family Planning Logistics Management Information System (FPLMIS) to ensure ASHAs had adequate supplies of short-term methods for household visits and how to ensure referrals for long-

Figure 1: Uptake of Family Planning at District Women's Hospitals in Firozabad

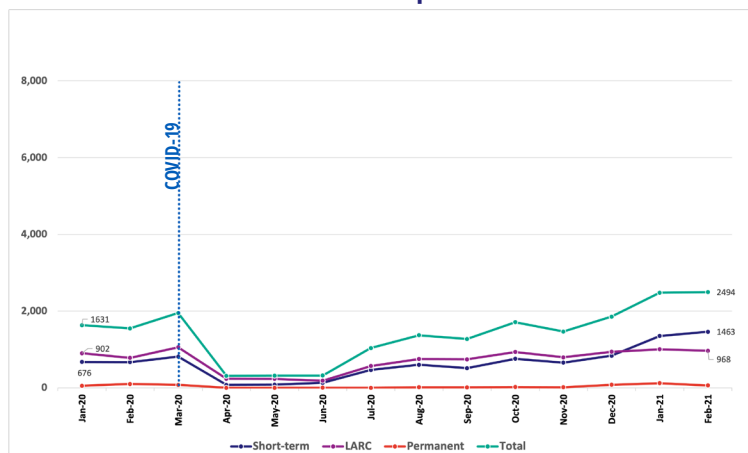
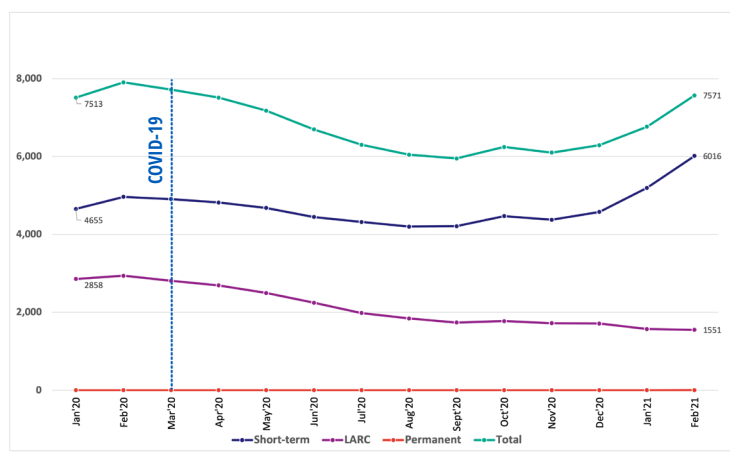


Figure 2: Uptake of Family Planning at UPHCs in Firozabad



Figures 1 and 2: To correct for seasonality and Couple Years of Protection, TCI uses annual rolling sums, comparing the annual change in family planning client volume from the baseline to the latest reporting period or the lowest point to account for any reversal of negative trends.

acting methods by accompanying interested clients to DWHs while the UPHCs were providing care for COVID patients.

Dr. Singh believes the city health plan – the product of a rigorous exercise mandated by the National Health Mission – led to the outcome seen in Firozabad and he recommends that other cities consider developing such a plan. This emerging best practice has the potential to strengthen a city’s resilience to withstand natural disasters and emerging pandemics.

TCIHC’s support of the development process for the innovative city health plan was also a key factor in enabling Firozabad to continue quality family planning service provision despite COVID-19. City officials made a commitment to have the city health plan guide their

efforts and regularly reviewed activities and data against it. In addition, it conducted routine FDS at DWHs and, as soon as the government allowed UPHCs to hold FDS days again, the city bounced back with all facilities providing all family planning methods in line with COVID-19 protocols.

As a result, Firozabad’s DWHs saw a 418% increase in annual client volume for long-acting reversible contraception (LARCs), according to Health Management Information System (HMIS) data from the DWHs (Fig. 1). This accounts for 968 LARC users since June 2020, when the lockdown was relaxed. At the UPHC level, the total number of family planning acceptors increased 20% from June 2020 to February 2021, with short-term acceptors contributing over 39% to this increase (Fig. 2).

Key Learnings from COVID-19

Dr. Bhanu Pratap Singh, Urban Nodal Officer, Firozabad

- COVID-19 demonstrated the importance of having a city health plan, which served as a guide to ensure no health area was overlooked.
- Dedicated FDS days/hours at DWHs can be offered as an alternative during any disaster in which services are interrupted at the UPHC level. But when the situation normalizes, DWHs should have FDS at defined intervals in a month to provide permanent methods to clients referred from UPHCs or directly by ASHAs.
- Review data and activities regularly to plan for and maintain success.
- Reorient staff and community health volunteers during any disaster on how to address fears in the community and yet still provide services.
- Motivate community health workers by recognizing their performance, especially in times of disaster and uncertainty.
- Service providers, such as staff nurses, are critical for counseling clients, assuaging fears and providing quality family planning services. Thus, reassure them of their safety, refresh their counseling skills and show them appreciation during monthly or quarterly review meetings.