

Indo-German Programme on Universal Health Coverage

From Innovation to Impact: The Success of 'Tele-MANAS' in Jammu and Kashmir



About:

The Indo German Programme on Universal Health Coverage (IGUHC) project of GIZ India has been providing technical cooperation to the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW) for successful implementation of Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri – Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY).

During the last four years of AB PM-JAY scheme implementation, National Health Authority (NHA) and State Health Agencies (SHA) have taken many initiatives in terms of process and technology improvement to increase service efficiency and strengthening the healthcare ecosystem of India

Tele-MANAS:

The Government of India (GoI) in the union budget of 2022 took a significant stride by introducing the National Tele Mental Health Programme of India, aptly named Tele Mental Health Assistance and Networking Across States (Tele-MANAS). This initiative was officially inaugurated in October 2022. Entrusting the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) with its oversight, Tele-MANAS is set to redefine mental healthcare across the nation in a comprehensive, integrated,

and inclusive manner. The Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (IMHANS) in Srinagar was among the centers chosen to play a role in this transformative effort.

Tele-MANAS Chatbot:

As a transformative step, the digital initiative known as the Tele-MANAS chatbot was unveiled in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) on July 5th, 2023. The recently introduced AI-powered chatbot serves to augment the Tele-MANAS service spectrum, enabling users to engage in automated dialogues. When required, users have the option to establish real-time connections with live counsellors affiliated with the Tele-MANAS team through the WhatsApp platform. Furthermore, the chatbot extends its capabilities by furnishing personalized activities and guidance that are meticulously tailored to address the unique mental health considerations of each user. This transformative endeavour empowers individuals to reach out, promoting early intervention and fostering a culture of emotional resilience in the region.



Availability of Round-the-Clock Counselling

The Tele-MANAS chatbot ensures 24/7 access to professional psychologists, health counsellors, and consultants for individuals in J&K, providing timely mental health support during critical moments of distress.



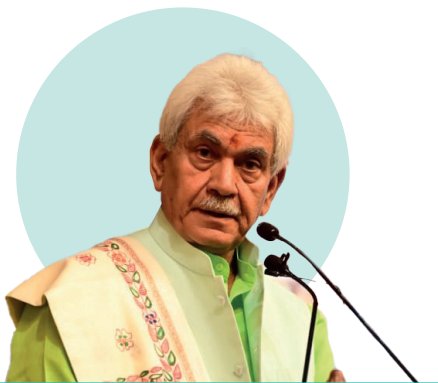
Launch at J&K Health Conclave

Tele-MANAS was launched during the Health Conclave on Mental Health and Non-Communicable Diseases held in J&K on July 5th 2023, raising awareness about the importance of mental health, and showcasing the role of digital technologies in addressing mental health challenges.



Leveraging Digital Solutions:

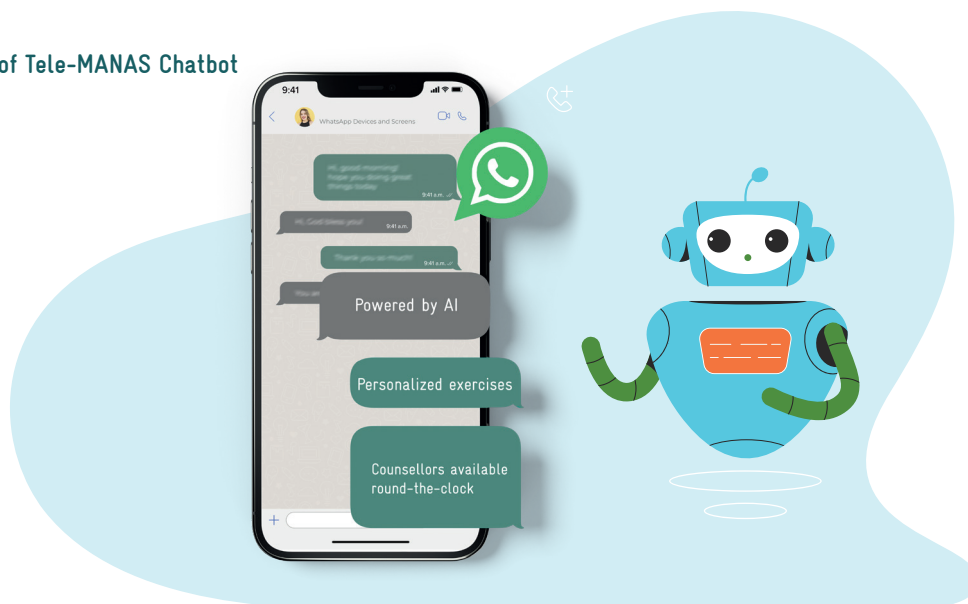
Tele-MANAS represents an innovative use of technology to address mental health issues, offering an accessible and user-friendly platform for individuals to engage with trained counsellors and mental health specialists.



“The new landmark initiatives launched today are testimony to the commitment of the J&K administration to provide quality, affordable and accessible healthcare services to all. I urge the Health Department to extend awareness campaigns to grassroots levels through committees in Panchayats by utilizing diverse mediums to disseminate information about Tele-MANAS effectively.”

Lieutenant Governor of J&K, Shri Manoj Sinha

Figure 1: Three USPs of Tele-MANAS Chatbot



Limitations and Challenges of the Existing System

The existing tele-counsellor services are available from 9 AM to 5 PM, a timeframe that presents several challenges and constraints:

- ➔ **Limited Availability for Adolescents:** Adolescents attending school and college often require assistance during later hours, and the restricted schedule can impede their access.
- ➔ **Restricted Access:** Many individuals have work or other commitments within these hours, making it challenging to access tele-counselling services. This limitation has the potential to exclude a significant portion of the population from seeking assistance.
- ➔ **Handling Emergency Situations:** Mental health crises can arise at any time, necessitating immediate support beyond regular working hours. The limited-service hours may result in inadequate assistance during critical junctures.
- ➔ **Longer Waiting Periods:** With a condensed window for service provision, there might be a heightened demand during peak hours, leading to extended waiting times.
- ➔ **Interruption in Continuity:** A service that operates round-the-clock offers a sense of consistent and ongoing support, whereas limited hours could disrupt the continuity of care.

Individuals grappling with initial signs of mental health concerns often hesitate to seek support due to various factors such as societal stigma, developing trust in tele-counsellors, language barriers, etc. These challenges often go unspoken, resulting in a lack of proactive support-seeking behaviour. In this context, an AI-enabled chatbot proves to be a highly valuable avenue, empowering individuals to openly express themselves without the fear of judgment and societal stigmatization. Additionally, given the current landscape, conventional avenues of in-person interactions to address personal emotions and apprehensions have encountered impediments. Individuals find it increasingly challenging to engage with traditional face-to-face methods, inhibiting their willingness to openly express feelings and uncertainties. In stark contrast, the utilization of a chatbot for interaction offers a more comfortable and accommodating platform. The digital interface provides a sense of assured privacy and anonymity, empowering and increased connect with individuals and especially teenagers to converse openly about their innermost thoughts and anxieties, which they might hesitate to do in a conventional setting. This novel approach bridges the gap between seeking support and overcoming barriers that might otherwise deter individuals from seeking help.

Figure 2: Service Delivery Framework for Tele-MANAS

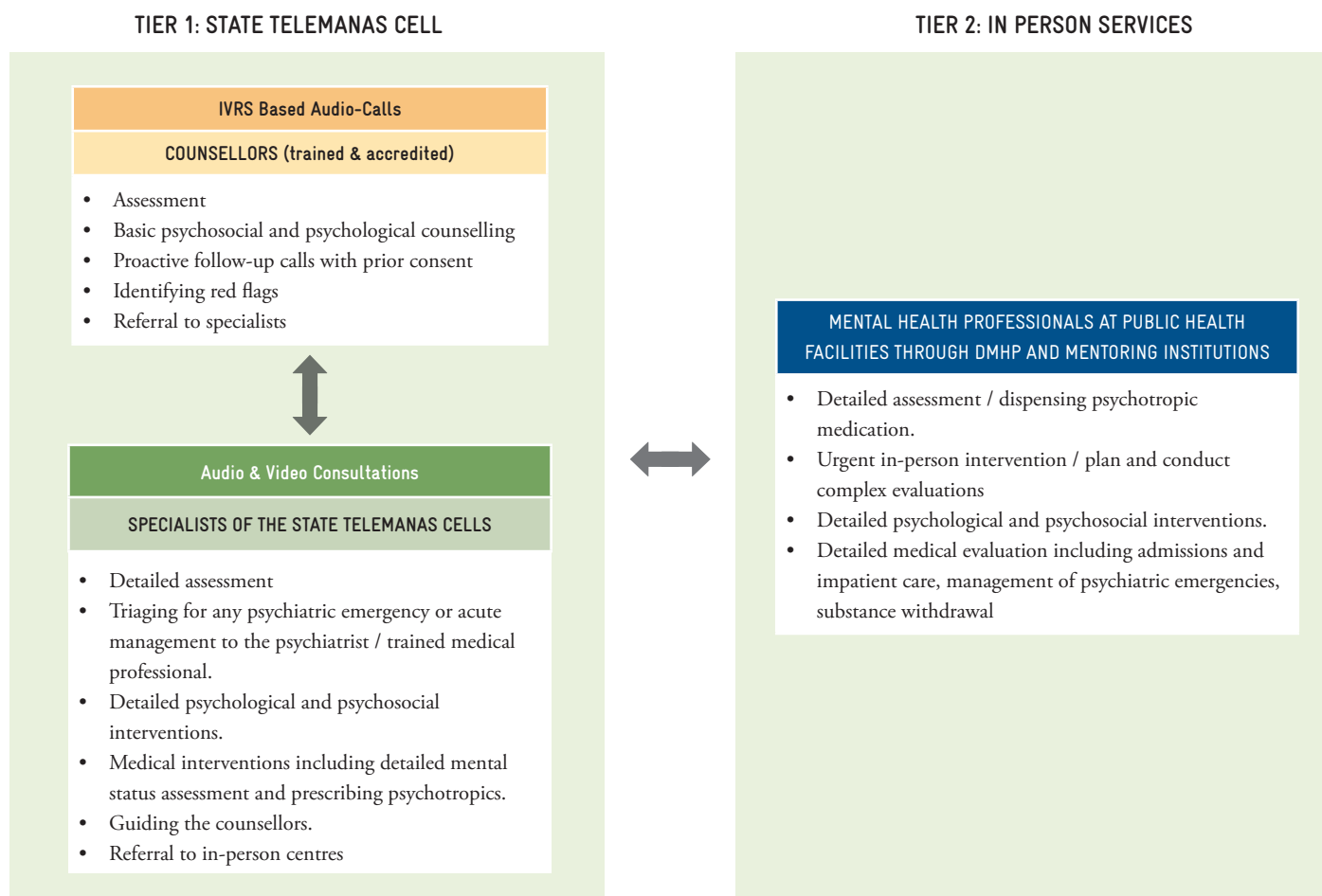
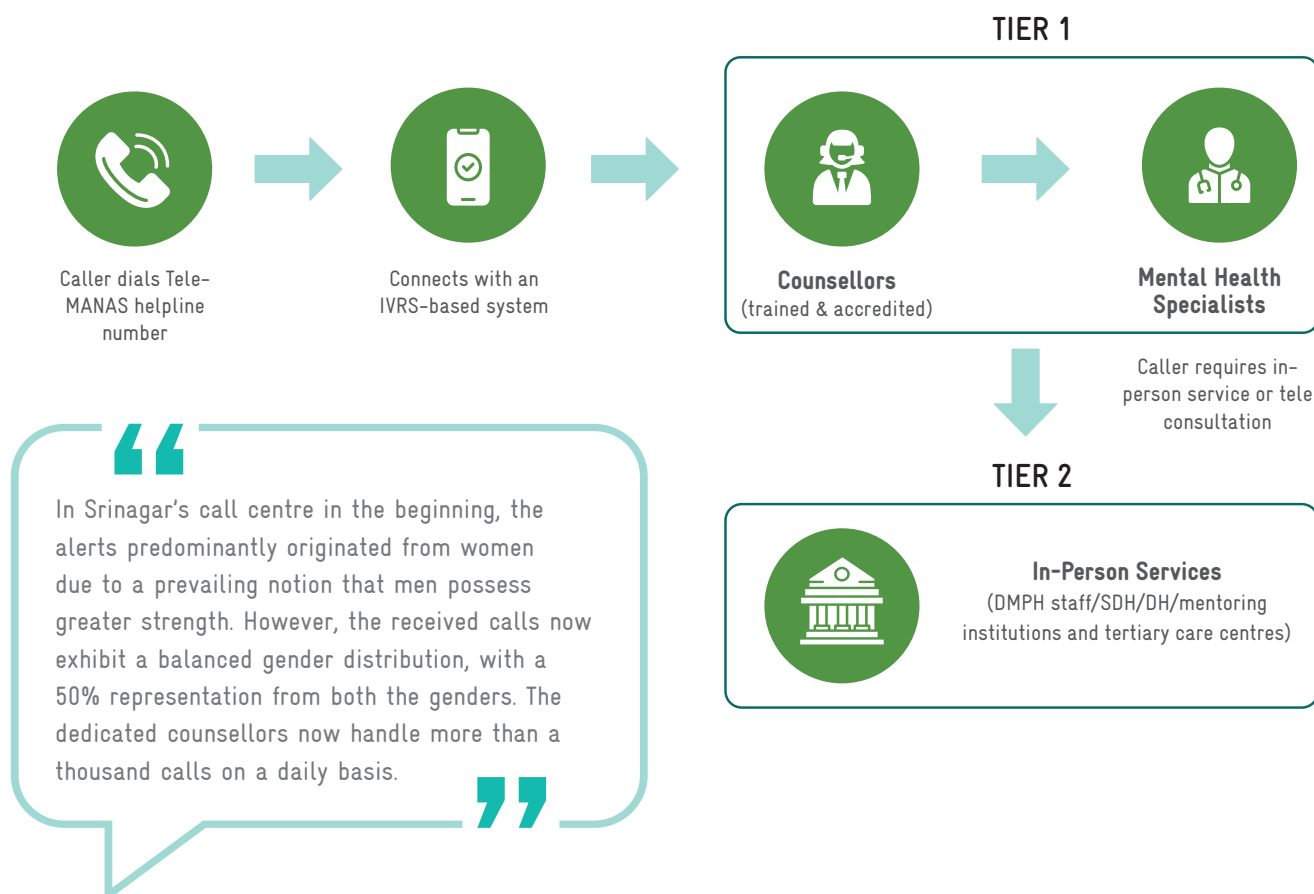


Figure 3: Tele-MANAS – Calling Mechanism





Dr. Qazi Haroon, State Programme Manager, Mental Health & Tele-MANAS J&K – “I stand witness to the exceptional achievements born from the inception of Tele-MANAS. The honourable LG of J&K inaugurated the Tele-MANAS chatbot in July, ushering in a comprehensive and harmonious solution for the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Personally, being part of such a groundbreaking initiative fills me with immense pride. The fusion of AI and interactive dual-channel communication has proved uniquely potent and is gaining noteworthy momentum. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to GIZ India for their timely support in advancing this mission.”

Dr. Aijaz Baba, Medical Superintendent, IMHANS-K – “I have observed a clear rise in modern times concerning mental health issues, accompanied by a heightened consciousness of seeking mental health resources. Historically, anxiety was commonly correlated with chest discomfort, leading individuals to consult cardiologists. Fortunately, the existence of services like Tele-MANAS guarantees access to fitting care and right direction. I hold a profound appreciation for GIZ India’s substantial involvement in propelling the chatbot’s evolution and hold optimism for their enduring support in our upcoming initiatives”



Dr. Deeba Nazeer, Junior Consultant, Tele-MANAS J&K – “The concerns we encounter encompass a broad spectrum of emotions such as sadness, anxiety, relationship challenges, substance dependence, and tendencies towards self-harm. Our highly skilled and extensively trained team of counsellors are available 24/7 to address these inquiries. With each call, we delve into the intricacies that shape the lives of today’s youth and recognize the significance of offering accurate guidance. The fact that we’re now receiving calls from adolescents residing even in the remote corners of J&K is truly heartening. This encouraging shift indicates a promising stride towards accessing mental health support.”

Tele-Counsellor at the Tele-MANAS Cell – “Embracing a 24-hour shift as a tele-counsellor, my journey unveils a remarkable transformation in providing mental health support. Initially, calls flowed predominantly from women, reflective of societal norms and misconceptions that branded men as stronger. Today, an inspiring shift has transpired—equal calls from both genders cascade in, dissolving barriers and fostering inclusivity. The age spectrum spans from 13 to 35, with a resounding resonance within the 13-25 age bracket. Guided by passion, each call is an opportunity to unravel complexities, soothing minds, and offering solace. In this evolving narrative, I stand humbled, knowing that in each conversation, I contribute to healing and empowerment.”



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