

# ASHAs of Odisha: overcoming COVID related stigma and discrimination

## More than 46,000 ASHAs working closely with local communities to fight COVID-19

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Manju Jeena, an ASHA from village Kandalei of Khurda district, Odisha, has been working tirelessly to support COVID-19 related activities and ensure that her community has access to essential and other health services. In her years of committed community service, Manju has built up significant social capital, enabling her to effectively negotiate in addressing COVID related stigma and resultant discrimination. When a young returnee migrant was denied entry into the village and his home, Manju took it upon herself to single-handedly address the stigmatizing behavior of the community. She combined community awareness on COVID-19 with relentless advocacy to ensure that the returnee was able to stay in home quarantine. She rigorously undertook regular follow up on his health status and healthcare needs during the quarantine period.

During the lockdown, she continued to facilitate access to other essential health services. She encouraged and accompanied several pregnant women for institutional delivery. Going beyond the call of duty, Manju also sewed face masks at home and distributed them to the poor in her village.



About 46,627 ASHAs in Odisha have emerged as champions against COVID-19 in rural and urban areas, addressing local health needs. They are seen to be working closely with Gaon Kalyan Samitis in the rural areas and Mahila Arogya Samitis in the urban areas, community collectives within which ASHAs are embedded. They have used these forums to facilitate COVID preventive actions by promoting the use of masks/face covers when stepping out in public spaces, being attentive towards frequent hand washing, following physical distancing, enhancing awareness of COVID symptoms etc.

