Overview
PATH has committed its efforts to enhancing the health system in the Satara district of Maharashtra. This endeavor involves strengthening comprehensive primary health care services with the goal of setting a precedent for excellence, making Satara a model district for replication and expansion. With the goal of contributing to the success of the CPHC program and advancing efforts toward improving quality, access, and affordability of primary health care, we introduced transformative solutions/innovations. These aim to accelerate screening and early diagnosis of prevalent communicable and non-communicable diseases in rural areas. In addition, a process innovation, Patient Support Groups (PSG), was introduced, which has the potential to significantly enhance adherence to treatment among individuals with chronic illnesses.

Together, these endeavors form a comprehensive cycle, encompassing screening, diagnosis, and care provision for common communicable and non-communicable illnesses in these underserved communities.

Patient support groups
Recognizing the value of community engagement, the primary health care program encourages the formation of PSGs through operational guidelines of Ayushman Arogya Mandir (AAM). These groups are facilitated by frontline workers, including Community Health Officers (CHOs), Multi-Purpose Workers (MPWs), and Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs). These groups are tailored to specific disease conditions and aim to improve treatment compliance and engage not only care-seekers but also their family members.

In partnership with the Public Health Department of the Government of Maharashtra and the Satara District Administration, PATH introduced a distinctive approach involving the establishment of PSGs facilitated by frontline workers. This innovative strategy aims to encourage individuals to actively participate in managing their health conditions and to address the gaps in effectively managing chronic diseases post-diagnosis.

As part of the district approach to strengthening primary health care, a delegation of CHOAs, district and state representatives underwent a specialized training and engaged with functional PSGs at Jan Swasthya Sahyog, in Chhattisgarh. The goal was to imbibe learnings from the successful implementation of PSGs for chronic illnesses. These health care workers later implemented the learnings and initiated PSGs for hypertension and diabetes mellitus in their own catchment areas.
In addition to this, the Department of Public Health, Government of Maharashtra and PATH, have developed a guidebook titled Guideline for Implementing Patient Support Groups, prepared on the basis of the learnings from various operational patient/peer support groups elsewhere. The document acts as a guidance document for operationalizing, running, managing, and evaluating PSGs in any geography and by any institute/health department.

Patient support group meeting at AAM, Hatgeghar. Photo: PATH