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Headline : No fund for breastfeeding campaign

Intro:

THE prime minister's commitment to tackle malnutrition among children by promoting breastfeeding seems to be hollow. The cabinet has agreed to increase maternity benefit allowance for working women from Rs 250 to Rs 1,000, but has remained silent about funds for the breastfeeding campaign.

The Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI) had appealed to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to provide budgetary support to the breastfeeding promotion campaign and to extend maternity benefit allowance to support exclusive breastfeeding.

The network's campaign aims to ensure that babies are exclusively breastfed for six months and all mothers are made aware of optimal feeding practices.

The campaign was at the centre stage of the 11th Five Year Plan till the time of drafting. The plan had also proposed a budgetary support of Rs 1258.20 crore under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). The budgetary support, however, did not find a mention when the plan was finalized. "There is no need to allocate separate funds, to the tune of Rs 1,000 crore, for promoting breastfeeding. It is just a campaign and can be covered under the ICDS. Aanganwadi workers (who work with ICDS projects) can train pregnant and lactating mothers," said S K Naik, director of the Department of Women and Child Development in the Planning Commission.

For BPNI the funds are not an issue. "A budgetary allocation will ensure responsibility for the cause through coordinated action and monitoring. A big amount is not significant but separate allocation is necessary," says Arun Gupta, national coordinator of BPNI. The minister for women and child development, Renuka Chowdhary, has assured BPNI to create a budget head during the 11th Five Year Plan, which is out though.

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