



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: 24 February 2026

### Fight Club India responds to the Union Budget 2026–27 mental health announcements

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### ***72.9% of Suicide Deaths Are Men. Yet, 0% of Mental Health Programmes Are Designed for Them. Fight Club India responds to the Union Budget 2026–27 mental health announcements***

Three out of every four people who die by suicide in India are men.

The Union Budget 2026–27 announced NIMHANS-2, upgrades to mental health institutes in Ranchi and Tezpur, and a 14% increase for Tele-MANAS. These are welcome steps.

However, none address the core question: why men account for 72.9% of all suicide deaths (NCRB, 2023), and what it would take to actually reach them.

#### **The Pattern:**

In 2023, India recorded 1,71,418 suicides, the highest ever. Men accounted for 1,24,924 deaths. The male-to-female suicide ratio widened from 2x in 2014 to 2.5x in 2021 (Lancet Regional Health – Southeast Asia, 2023). Suicides among men citing family problems grew 107% in that period. Married men die by suicide at 1.73x the rate of married women.

The gender paradox of suicidal behaviour is well documented (Frontiers in Psychiatry, 2022): women report higher rates of diagnosed depression and anxiety, yet men die by suicide at significantly higher rates. **The drivers: emotional suppression, maladaptive coping, self-stigma around help-seeking are behavioural, not clinical. They require upstream intervention.**

#### **What's Missing:**

None of India's flagship mental health programmes include gender-responsive design for men. No dedicated upstream prevention. No peer-led community infrastructure. **The policy is gender-neutral in design. The outcomes are not.**

Mental health received 1.05% of the total health budget in 2025–26 (The Lancet Psychiatry, 2025).

India has ~9,000 psychiatrists and <2,840 clinical psychologists for 1.4 billion people. Only 700 psychiatry PG seats are available annually.

Between 2014–2020, only five states spent over 50% of DMHP funds allocated to them (India Mental Health Observatory). Tele-MANAS has handled ~30 lakh calls but publishes no gender-disaggregated outcome data.

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Present in: Bangalore, India



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### Prevention vs. Treatment: The Gap in Early Intervention

The National Suicide Prevention Strategy (NSPS), targets a 10% reduction in suicide mortality by 2030. It explicitly calls for early intervention. But the budget allocates no resources to non-clinical, community-based prevention. All funding flows to helplines (Tele-MANAS) and hospitals (DMHP) reactive systems that activate after crisis, not before it.

**What's unfunded:** emotional literacy programmes before crisis hits. Life skills training for young men. Community models that normalise vulnerability and promoted emotional resilience. Movement-based mental health that integrates physical and emotional regulation. The Economic Survey clearly calls for upstream approaches, however, the budget doesn't fund them.

India's treatment gap stands at 83–85% (National Mental Health Survey, 2015–16). For men, self-stigma compounds the gap: research on Indian men aged 18–29 shows adherence to traditional masculine norms is significantly negatively correlated with willingness to seek help (IJIP, 2025). **You cannot scale clinical infrastructure past a population socialised not to use it.**

### Reaching Men Where Trust Is Built:

With fewer than 0.3 psychiatrists per 1,00,000 people (WHO, 2022), the clinical system alone will not close this gap within the decade. Peer-led, community-based models are not an alternative they are a necessary complement. This is what Fight Club India has been building in Bangalore since January 2025: facilitated round tables of 6–8 men, movement-based sessions that combine physical activity with open dialogue, and third-space experiences anchored in community rather than clinical framing. Backed by professional mental health advisors, **our model sits upstream of crisis, normalising emotional expression and building male peer accountability before the point of emergency.**

**The NSPS aims for a 10% suicide reduction by 2030. To hit that target, you must address the 72.9%.** FC's model is early intervention, crisis prevention, and community support specifically designed around male help-seeking barriers. It is the gender-specific upstream strategy the NSPS is missing.

### We're inviting you:

Fight Club India is one year old. We are a small organisation with a clear direction, early evidence from the ground, and a strategy to scale peer-led prevention across Indian cities. We don't have the answers yet, but we have enough signal to know this model is needed and that it works when done right. That's why we're inviting collaboration, not claiming we can do this alone.

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**To policymakers and mental health organisations:** partner with us on gender-disaggregated data and funding upstream prevention for men.

**To brands and employers:** you shape what masculinity means daily. If you want to contribute substantively, let's talk.

**To civil society and grassroots organisations:** male emotional literacy doesn't need to be built from scratch, it needs to be woven into spaces men already trust. If you're in those rooms, so should this work.

*"If men aren't going to therapy, it doesn't mean they don't want help, it means the intervention options need to expand. And that doesn't require reinventing the wheel. Strengthening existing social structures where men have permission to show up and designing those spaces to also hold emotional honesty building resilience is early intervention. These approaches cost a fraction of crisis response and the budget should reflect the same."*

- Ayesha Syed Asif, Founder, Fight Club India Foundation

### **About Fight Club India**

Fight Club India Foundation (est. 2025, Section 8 Company since January 2026) builds peer-based communities where men practise vulnerability, emotional accountability, and mutual support through facilitated conversations and movement-based sessions. Working on behaviour change among men. Currently active in Bangalore.

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**"In a country like ours, Fight Club aims to be quietly revolutionary."**

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