

Alliance Against Conflict of Interest (AACI)

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Statement of Concern

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Alliance Against Conflicts of Interest (AACI) Calls for disbanding of Partnership of FSSAI and IYNCI : a front organisation of Abbot, Danone, Mead Johnson and Nestle

Food Safety Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is organizing an awareness program scheduled to be held in New Delhi at India Habitat Centre on 28th October, 2017 for doctors, dietitians, parents/patients to build awareness about diets for management of Inborn Errors of Metabolism (IEM) & allergy conditions in children under its project named "Diet4Life". According to a communication received from one its partners NNF, "...Against this backdrop, the awareness programs are being **organised across the country** with the involvement of all the stakeholders of IEM.."

According to the FSSAI "Diet4Life" [project website](#) it will provide a comprehensive platform to parents, health care professionals and parent support groups to adopt the right approach towards Inborn IEM management. This appears to be a laudable objective.

However ,what is astounding is the list of partners of the this project. Among several health professionals associations and pioneer government medical institutions, is a NGO named Infant And Young Child Nutrition Council Of India (IYNCI), which is a front organisation of baby food industry with four baby food companies i.e. **Abbot, Danone, Mead Johnson and Nestle** as its members.

The awareness programme being organized by FSSAI in partnership with IYNCI on 28th October 2017 is second in row after a similar event was executed in [Pune on 16th September, 2017](#) ;where IYNCI has been reported to be the key partner. Also , as per the information available on FSSAI "Diet4Life" website IYNCI & Indian Dietetic Association (IDA), Delhi chapter organized the [National Level Training of the Trainers workshop at AIIMS](#), New Delhi in April 2017. Earlier, in an RTI response on 10th November 2016 FSSAI mentioned that their partnership with IYNCI is voluntary based on its specialized nature of expertise. IYNCI , on its [website](#) has listed

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"Diet4Life" under "our projects". This makes it even more confusing and deceptive in terms of its ownership.

The proposed awareness programme clearly poses conflicts of interest. It is important to note, the recently launched Niti Aayog's [National Nutrition Strategy](#) recommends that nutrition programmes and partnerships should be free from conflicts of interest.

In a [technical report](#) on addressing and managing conflicts of interest WHO has stated "Analogously, a company – say a breast-milk substitute manufacturer – obviously cannot divest its interests in selling breast-milk substitute and so might have to be prohibited from certain kinds of involvement with government altogether. For example, a breast-milk substitute manufacturer's interests might be deemed so inconsistent with the public interest that its participation in a multimember stakeholder group advising government on early infant nutrition policy should be prohibited..".

Food for Special Medical Purpose (FSMP) used in the treatment of IEM are special formulas which are infant milk substitutes as defined in the [Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles and Infant Foods \(Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution\) Act, 1992 and Amendment Act, 2003 \(IMS Act\)](#). IMS Act under Section 9 prohibits direct or indirect benefits to health workers or their associations through funding seminars, meetings, conference, education courses, contests, fellowships, research works or sponsorships to any health worker or their associations. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India has a firm position against collaboration by government agencies with baby food industry. Dr. Arun Kumar Panda, the then Mission Director, National Health Mission (NHM) on 5th June 2017 in his directive letter to all state health secretaries about effective implementation of the IMS Act stated “..issue a notification to all state governments, medical colleges and health care institutes and association of doctors and nurses, notified to abstain from any kind of collaboration or receiving sponsorships from baby food industry...” . This is evident the collaboration between FSSAI & IYNCI defies the health ministry's directive.

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Ironically, baby food manufacturers whom FSSAI need to regulate, are being provided government platform to engage with healthcare professionals and parents, which is unethical and illegal.

Alliance Against Conflict of Interests(AACI)¹demands :

1. Call off this partnership between FSSAI & IYNCI for "Diet4Life" project with immediate effect.
2. Government of India institutions/ministries working on nutrition policy should assess and manage conflicts of interest. (WHO has provided tools for this purpose).
3. Any sponsorship of health workers or their associations should be scrutinized before it happens, as a preventive measure for effectively implementing the IMS Act.
4. Government of India or others should procure special medical foods as they procure other medicines.

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¹ AACI is an alliance of organizations and individuals working in various sectors – doctors, lawyers, women's and children's health groups, activists.