The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) signed an MoU with the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), a policy research institution, to launch a new ‘Initiative on Solar for Healthcare’. The collaboration will focus on providing effective health care delivery at the last mile by reducing uncertainty in critical infrastructure, particularly electricity supply via cost effective solar-based solutions.

Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, Director General, ICMR, said, “The collaboration with CEEW will bring together synergies between the objective of ‘time to care’ as mandated in the National Health Mission (NHM) and clean energy as outlined under the National Solar Mission (NSM). Under this collaboration, on a pilot basis, we will install solar systems at select PHCs in partnership with three state governments and evaluate its impact on healthcare delivery and health outcomes. The aim of the collaboration is to create resilient health systems in rural India, benefitting primarily women and children.”

As of 2015, nearly 35 million citizens in rural India rely on un-electrified PHCs for primary health services. In the absence of electricity, services catered by health institutions such as institutional deliveries, paediatric emergencies, and administering of vaccines get severely affected. Electricity access in health centres is also imperative as a means to facilitate communication services, tele-health applications and to retain skilled health workers. Dr. Arunabha Ghosh, CEO, CEEW, said, “The collaboration with ICMR supports the systematic and productive advancement in national policies, regulations and actions to leverage solar energy for a social purpose: enhancing the quality of healthcare delivery at various levels of governance.”

The synergy between health and energy are the two specific goals of this initiative, and the efforts within this collaboration advances on both fronts.