

Advancing Preventive Health in the Philippines

What is preventive health?

Prevention strategies enabled by the healthcare ecosystem, including policies, programs, and interventions that are delivered, facilitated, or implemented by various healthcare ecosystem players. The World Health Organization defines prevention as “approaches and activities aimed at reducing the likelihood that a disease or disorder will affect an individual, interrupting or slowing the progress of the disorder or reducing disability.”

Why should the Philippines focus on preventive health?

The National Objectives for Health (2023-2028) envisions a healthier population and stronger health systems in the Philippines, with significant implications for preventive health. To achieve these goals, it is important to assess the present state of preventive health holistically through a three-pronged framework: *Policy, Interventions, and Financing.*

I. Policy Insights

Current Landscape:

Philippines has a series of robust legislation and strategies aimed at promoting preventive services.



While implementation and adoption have been gradual, there is a clear commitment to bridge the gap.



Barriers to effective implementation need to be addressed to ensure tangible improvements in health outcomes for all segments of the population.

Recommendations:

- **Re-evaluate policies and legislation on health financing management and procurement:** Implement financial system measures to streamline processes and unlock funds for preventive health services.
- **Reconcile Omnibus guidelines:** Clarify which preventive health interventions must be available on-site in public facilities and which must be procured from the private sector.
- **Strengthen outbreak, epidemic, and pandemic preparedness policies:** Develop comprehensive policies focusing on community awareness, disease surveillance, and emergency response infrastructure.



II. Access Insights

Current Landscape:

Given low financing for primary health services, there are significant disparities in preventive health service access and affordability in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDA) populations relative to major urban areas.



Low financing for primary health services in GIDA populations.



Geographic divides in healthcare accessibility, especially in GIDA and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) populations.



Significant disparities in access and affordability compared to urban areas.

Childhood and adult immunizations are low and declining, even those provided through the National Immunization Program (NIP)



Only 62% of children received necessary vaccines by 12 months.



Adult immunization coverage is insufficient, with pneumonia as a leading cause of death and low influenza vaccine uptake among seniors, despite the Expanded Pneumococcal Immunization Programme achieving 52.9% coverage for those over 60. Additionally, there is low vaccine coverage for polio, measles, pertussis, influenza, pneumococcal, and HPV, among others.



PhilHealth reimbursements ensure access to vaccinations, but the Philippines experienced outbreaks of pertussis and measles in 2024, highlighting gaps in vaccine coverage

Most preventive health screenings and diagnostics are unavailable, and provided opportunistically, rather than routinely to target populations.



Most screenings and diagnostics are opportunistic, not routine. Access to some essential screening services for breast cancer, cervical cancer, gender-based violence, and mental health conditions, are lacking altogether.



Primary Care Benefit Package covers various tests, but facilities often don't have the funding or manpower to provide them



Logistical challenges and shortages in remote areas.

Limited outbreak (epidemic and pandemic) preparedness infrastructure, despite available Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) programs.



Significant gaps in pandemic preparedness, especially in rural areas.



Local disaster plans focus on natural disasters, not epidemics.



Uneven disease surveillance capacity across provinces.

Digital technologies limited to virtual consultations, and Electronic Medical Records (EMR) development is slow.



Digital technologies use limited to virtual consultations and telemedicine.



Challenges in implementing EMR in rural health facilities.



Slow adoption of EMR due to lack of institutional support.

Recommendations:

Strengthen cooperation between the Department of the Interior and Local Government and the Department of Health.

- Enhance the consistency of healthcare services by upgrading and harmonizing the quality of primary, secondary, tertiary facilities as well as laboratory infrastructure.

Develop a comprehensive strategy to address low vaccination rates.

- Strengthen community engagement, improve access at the barangay level, and collaborate with NGOs to expand outreach for vaccination programs.

Raise awareness on service provision and reimbursement policies.

- Improve public awareness of recommended health screenings and diagnostics and ensure clarity of reimbursement policies.

Accelerate the adoption of Electronic Health Records.

- Align the Philippines eHealth Agenda with its ambitious goals to enhance the continuity of preventive care.

III. Financing Insights

Current Landscape:

Effective health spending, especially for primary and preventive health services, is low.



Primary care investments stagnating at 4% of current health expenditure since 2014.



Local government spending on health has increased modestly, but national government subsidies remain the primary source of financing for devolved health programs.

Despite passage of the Universal Health Care Act, out-of-pocket burden (OOP) in the Philippines remains high particularly for outpatient care.



Household OOP health spending accounted for 41.5% of current health expenditure.



Primary care payouts were only 1% of PhilHealth's total benefit payments in 2022.

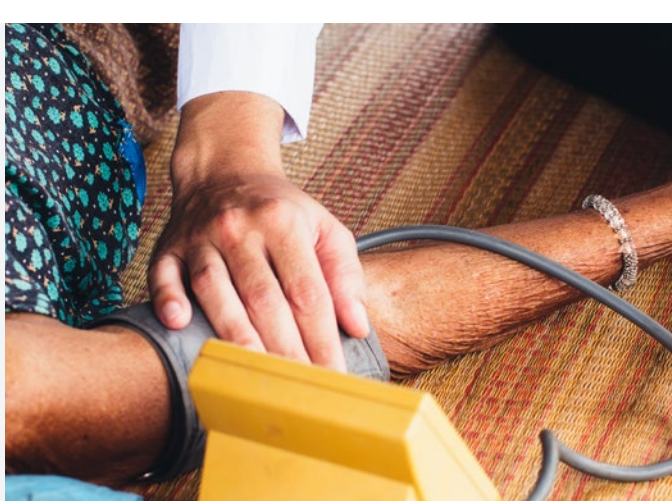
Recommendations:

Shift usage and spending towards primary care.

- Set measurable spending targets and compare service types and delivery costs in tertiary vs. primary care to estimate potential savings.

Align Omnibus Health Guidelines with PhilHealth reimbursement policies.

- Ensure that preventive health services outlined in the Omnibus guidelines are available and affordable to the public.



Healthcare systems today are at a crossroads. For the Philippines to ensure sustainability of its healthcare system, a preventive health approach is no longer optional; it's a necessity.

Read our full report, *Advancing Preventive Health in Southeast Asia: Recommendations for Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam*

