

The Philippine healthcare sector plays a crucial role in the country's socioeconomic framework. Not only does it promote public health, it is also a pillar in generating employment, mobilising economic activities, and encouraging efforts towards innovation. With this, it becomes even more evident that the healthcare sector deeply intersects with both public health initiatives and economic development, forming an integral part of the Philippine landscape.

Over the past years, the Philippine healthcare sector has achieved several milestones and noted a number of important developments. These include the passage of the Universal Health Care Act of 2019 or Republic Act (RA) No. 11223, the National Integrated Cancer Control Act or RA No. 11215, and more recently, the Regional Specialty Centers Act or RA No. 11959. It is likewise worthy to note that measures to ease regulatory and supply chain bottlenecks have also been put in place, including the implementation of regulatory reliance to accelerate product registrations, as well as eased custom clearance for healthcare products, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, under the current administration, the 8-Point Action Agenda outlines the Department of Health's key priorities to drive better health outcomes, stronger health systems, and access to all levels of care.¹ Recent pronouncements of the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) have also shown the expansion of coverage and benefits including those for mental health, pneumonia, and breast cancer.²

Nonetheless, the health sector remains challenged with a high household out-of-pocket payment share (44.7%) in the current health expenditure,³ shortage of healthcare professionals,⁴ as well as the lack of access to healthcare products especially in public hospitals due to the number of medications under the Philippine National Formulary (PNF).⁵

To build on the gains and address the bottlenecks in the Philippine healthcare sector, the ECCP presents its recommendations encompassing the use of technological developments, promotion of effective and adaptive procurement methods, enhancement of health financing mechanisms, and strengthening of Health Technology Assessment (HTA), among others.

Firstly, the ECCP advocates for **strengthened national health information systems**, towards improved resource allocation, as well as the delivery of high-quality and evidence-based health interventions. This can be achieved through improved data collection and assessment and enhanced integration and streamlining capabilities, further supported by improving connectivity infrastructure and capacity-building initiatives for health and other practitioners.

In addition to this, an **enhanced procurement scheme for the healthcare sector** should be accounted for in the proposed amendments to the Government Procurement Reform Act (GPRA). Particularly, there should be **sector-specific guidelines on procurement**, as specific technical requirements are required to guarantee the quality, safety, and effectiveness of medical products. At the same time, the **promotion of value-based procurement** is imperative in striking a balance between price and quality of such life-saving products. In view of increasing access to medicines and other health commodities, we likewise strongly urge the **institutionalisation of procurement of healthcare products that are not in the PNF or are undergoing HTA review**. We also highly suggest the implementation of pooled procurement and multi-year

¹ [National Objectives for Health Philippines 2023-2028](#).

² [PhilHealth Latest Circulars](#).

³ [Philippine National Health Accounts](#).

⁴ [Nurses bleeding, leaving, lacking](#).

⁵ [How Pharmaceutical Systems are Organized in Asia and the Pacific](#).

contracts, as well as introduction of new procurement modalities. These mechanisms can reduce costs significantly by consolidating demand for healthcare commodities, as well as allow for more strategic negotiation of favourable terms and conditions in the procurement of health products. Finally, procurement processes should be strengthened and made more adaptive through the **use of digital technology** which will help create a more streamlined, effective, and transparent procurement system, as well as drive **capacity building efforts for public procurement professionals**, through the development of a competency and certification frameworks, code of conduct, as well as rollout of capacity development programs.

To ease financial burden to Filipinos while improving access to health products and services, the ECCP likewise strongly supports the **expansion of PhilHealth coverage and capacity**. As the country's primary health insurance provider, PhilHealth holds significant responsibility in bridging the accessibility gap to groundbreaking health treatments and vital products. As such, while the ECCP recognises the recent developments in the the benefit packages and services of PhilHealth, we highly recommend its further expansion to cover all elements of health care across disease areas (such as mental health, rare diseases in both paediatric and adult populations, renal disease, and rare cancers), throughout the patient journey, as well as preventive medicine approach. In terms of overall health funding plans, we recommend that differential pricing, co-payment, and expanded reimbursement modalities be considered.

Moreover, recognising its critical role in improving equity and healthcare services and outcomes, we highly recommend that the **delivery of primary health care services is further strengthened**, specifically through the mandatory registration of Filipinos to public or private primary health care provider of choice, improvement of accessibility of patient records to primary health care providers, capacity-building for health professionals and local government units on the provision of primary care services; and creating a strong mechanism of digital healthcare solutions for better access to primary health care services.

Finally, as we underscore its importance in bridging access to quality and life-saving treatment and medications, the ECCP strongly suggests the **strengthening of Health Technology Assessment** in the country. Specifically, we call for the establishment of dedicated HTA methods for specific technologies and treatments, as well as broadening the choice criteria to consider other factors such as insurance value, real option value, and indirect cost; the establishment of a pathway to improve the efficiency of the HTA process; the development of parallel process and submission between the FDA and HTA; as well as the development of a predictable, transparent, and trackable process in line with the requirements of the Ease of Doing Business Act.

In advancing these policy reforms and health interventions, the ECCP emphasises the necessity of **multi-sectoral dialogue and collaboration for achieving optimal health outcomes**. Dialogues among healthcare actors and stakeholders including the government, private sector, patient groups, and trade associations, among others, facilitate the exchange of best practices, monitoring of sector developments, and formulation of evidence-based recommendations for the healthcare sector. To this end, The ECCP remains committed to strengthening partnerships with health stakeholders and will continue to prioritise healthcare on its agenda. Through its engagement with the Philippine government and collaborative efforts with its Healthcare Committee members and partners, the ECCP seeks to continue supporting the national health goals and advancing the country's health objectives.