

Philippines: Health

The healthcare system in the Philippines is a mix of public and private sector services. Launched in 1995, the National Health Insurance Program (NHIP) is the largest insurance program in the country in terms of coverage and benefit payments. It is administered by the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth). All employed persons under the age of 60, in both the private and the public sectors, are required to contribute to PhilHealth through payroll taxes. Local Government Units make payments for the poor. Enrollment by the self-employed is voluntarily. The insurance program has historically failed to provide sufficient financial protection, making patients often liable for substantial copayments. Dental care is not covered. Since 2010 the government has mounted a major reform effort that aims to increase the number of poor people covered, extend benefits, and reduce or eliminate copayments. Primary care is delivered through public health care centers, including health outposts in villages. The private insurance and HMO sector has grown considerably, but it still accounts for only about 11 percent of total health spending. Private primary services are provided through freestanding clinics, private clinics in hospitals, and group practice, or polyclinics. They generally cater to the population who can afford their services. Traditionally government hospitals are larger and have more beds compared to private hospitals. The medical staff in the Philippines is generally well-trained; the country trains the largest number of nurses of any nation, and many find work abroad.

Many Filipinos see doctors only as a last resort and use traditional remedies as alternatives. The government has implemented childhood vaccination programs and provides nutritional supplements for small children and nursing mothers. The incidence of tropical diseases such as malaria, typhoid, and dengue fever has fallen, though they still occur. Gastrointestinal diseases are fairly common. Malaria and leprosy remain a problem in a number of areas. The leading cause of death is heart disease. Communicable diseases continue to be a major cause of mortality. Although the national prevalence is low, the Philippines has seen a sharp rise since 2010 in new HIV infections. Life expectancy stands at nearly 70 years. The Department of Health is the national agency charged with health-related matters.

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