



EpiMetrics, Inc.

The Guaranteed Health Benefits Package Study Series
Phase 2 : Technical Assistance to the Philippine Health Insurance
Corporation in Developing a Benefit Development Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Abstract

Achieving universal health care remains a relevant theme in the Philippines' health agenda. As PhilHealth continues to expand its coverage and scope of benefit packages, it needs a transparent and systematic method of prioritization that will optimize resource allocation for competing health needs. This four-phase study aims to provide our national policymakers with evidence-based information to guide the decision-making process of developing benefit packages in order to ensure financial risk protection, continuity, and quality of care for all Filipinos.

Phase I projects the Philippines' burden of disease profile from 2015-2035, based on the 2013 Global Burden of Disease (GBD) database, as well as the age and sex structure of the population. This data is fed into **Phase II** of the study, which aims to develop a formal priority setting process. A literature review followed by a series of consultations were conducted to synthesize the best practices and health system models of Thailand, Australia, and UK, and determine which are applicable to our country's context. This generated a seven-step priority setting process from nomination to approval, complemented by a set of 4 criteria points that will facilitate the assessment of new interventions for PhilHealth coverage. It is anticipated that these, alongside 7 accountability-based principles, will increase transparency and stakeholder participation necessary to achieve the country's health system goals.

Phase II also tested the feasibility of the World Health Organization's (WHO) OneHealth Tool to conduct generalized cost-effectiveness analyses (GCEA) and budget impact analysis (BIA) for all interventions that may be considered under the GHBP. Our reflections have been published in the peer-reviewed publication *F1000R*: <https://f1000research.com/articles/7-157/v2>.

Executive Summary

A. Introduction

Historically, the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) has struggled from the lack of a clear and definite process of expanding its benefits, may it be in the form of including new services, or in developing new packages. As such, lobbying from select stakeholders remains to be the prevalent and dominant starting points to benefit package development. This method does not necessarily guarantee that PhilHealth fulfills its mandate or that the country's health system goals of improving health outcomes, responsiveness, and financial risk protection are met. In this light, the second phase of the project aimed to recommend a systematic process and set of criteria to prioritize new interventions that will be covered. A key aspect of this process is ensuring legitimacy by a strong and engaged set of stakeholders.

B. Methods

The recommended process and criteria were developed iteratively through a series of technical reviews and broad stakeholder consultations. Literature was first reviewed to determine international best practices particularly focusing on the Thailand, Australia, and the United Kingdom (UK) models. Practices of these countries were organized and fielded to several stakeholder groups through a series of focus group discussion (FGDs). Complementary to this, past experiences of stakeholder groups closely relating to any process of priority setting were also probed. The results of these FGDs were then used to formulate recommendations on the most appropriate priority setting process and criteria for the country. As a means to better refine, define, and operationalize details, experts from different fields relevant to public health were brought together for round table discussions (RTDs) on the proposed process and criteria. This step helped further firm up the proposed priority setting process and criteria, and generated much needed context and basis for its unique design and contents. As a final step, participant of the FGDs and RTDs were convened as one plenary, for final presentation of and feedback on the proposal. In between these formal activities, side consultations with other experts were also held for guidance and direction.

C. Results and Discussion

This series of consultative activities generated a 7-step priority setting process that begins with nomination, shortlisting, generation of evidence, appraisal, approval for coverage, benefit package design and development, and finally, approval for implementation. A set of 4 criteria points were also deemed necessary to complement this process of assessing interventions for PhilHealth coverage. The entirety of this is governed by a set of 7 accountability-based principles that were reviewed, enhanced and accepted by stakeholders as representative of the goals of both priority setting process, and the country's health system goals.

D. Conclusions and Recommendations

PhilHealth should implement an explicit priority setting process and use a standardized set of criteria to manage requests and inform coverage decisions of new interventions. Through the engagement of stakeholders and transparency in this process, it is anticipated that there will be wider acceptance and participation once this policy is implemented by the government. However, to implement the above reforms, a detailed strategy and plan for shifting the current benefit packages into a guaranteed health benefit package (GHBP) must be laid out. Some action steps include: (1) Revising disease and interventions currently covered and segregating them as GHBP and Non-GHBP; (2) Assembling the GHBP to cover the 48 most burdensome diseases with cost-effective and properly costed interventions, (3) Subjecting the Non-GHBP interventions to the priority setting process; (3) Strengthening the role of PhilHealth as strategic purchaser; (4) Ensuring DOH spearhead health service delivery to ensure accessibility services and provide active support to LGUs; (5) Contracting health service providers that are compliant with the plans.

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