



**World Health  
Organization**

Western Pacific  
Philippines



# EU and WHO provide lifesaving medical-grade oxygen for preparedness against new COVID-19 variants

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Representatives from the European Union and the World Health Organization handed over 200 oxygen concentrators and relevant consumables to DOH Secretary Dr Francisco T. Duque III.

The donation – valued at over PHP 7 million – supports pandemic preparedness and the capacity of health facilities amid the potential threat of new COVID-19 variants.

With the European Union's support, WHO Philippines had also previously distributed 250 pre-filled oxygen cylinders – valued at PHP 2.6 million – to 11 health facilities in seven regions in the country.

“A few battles have been won already, but the fight is still on! With our EU Member States, we have provided over 35 million COVID-19 vaccine doses to the Philippines through the COVAX facility and more doses have been exported from the EU to the Philippines. Now we are pleased that, through our financial assistance, the WHO has swiftly managed to provide oxygen therapy for COVID-19 patients. This will benefit some of the most vulnerable persons in need of therapy, including elderly persons affected by other respiratory diseases, pregnant women, and new-borns, especially in the most remote areas of the country. This will lead to saving more lives and an overall strengthening of the health system”, said H. E. Luc Véron, EU Ambassador to the Philippines.

The oxygen cylinders were distributed to 11 health facilities, as far as Batanes General Hospital in the north and Zamboanga City Medical Center in the south. These commodities proved most beneficial to hospitals that had reported shortages of medical-grade oxygen due to logistical or production issues. With this support, COVID-19 patients received urgent lifesaving care.



*Pre-filled oxygen cylinders arrive at the Zamboanga City Medical Center. © ZCMC*

“About 20% of COVID-19 patients will require oxygen therapy to prevent respiratory failure. Early and ready access to medical oxygen can make all the difference to patients developing severe COVID-19 and with severe COVID-19,” says Dr Rabindra Abeyasinghe, WHO Representative to the Philippines. “WHO remains committed to support the Department of Health to reduce the loss of lives through supporting expansion of access and availability of medical oxygen, as the country prepares to deal with emerging variants of the virus such as Omicron.”

At present, the Philippines has several limitations and challenges in oxygen production and supply. There are only five major medical-grade oxygen cryogenic plants in the country, which are private companies located in Luzon Island. Around half of the DOH hospitals across the country – 34 out of

66 hospitals – have their own oxygen generating plant, while the rest of the health facilities depend on private distributors of medical oxygen supplies, which could have limited production capacities. Furthermore, supplies like oxygen tanks, cylinders, and concentrators have to be imported, since the country does not have any local manufacturer of such supplies.

“The Zamboanga City Medical Center would like to express our sincerest appreciation to the EU and the WHO for their donation of oxygen tanks,” said Dr Afdal B Kunting, Medical Center Chief II of ZCMC. “Having these tanks on hand allowed us to stabilise our oxygen supply by having a buffer when the supply was low. Many lives were saved because of this donation.”

“The donation made by the EU through the WHO has helped us provide oxygen tanks to identified disadvantaged areas where there is no regular transportation of oxygen,” said Dr Esterlina Tan, Chief of Hospital of Siargao Island Hospital.

“We are thankful to the WHO and European Union for providing these oxygen concentrators that will be distributed to our hospitals around the Philippines. These supplies are essential in our COVID-19 response to provide better health outcomes to Filipinos. We are more confident that we can readily respond to the potential threat of the Omicron variant with this donation. Let us all work together to curb the spread of COVID-19 by properly wearing masks, washing our hands, observing physical distancing, and ensuring proper ventilation. I also urge everyone to get vaccinated to get an additional protection against COVID-19,” said Health Secretary Dr Francisco T. Duque III.

**For more information, please contact:**

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