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### SHARING RESPONSIBILITIES FOR HEALTH

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The National Objectives for Health for 1999 to 2004 offers a vision of improved health for all Filipinos. It sets the direction on where we want to be and what we want to achieve in terms of our health. While individuals, families, communities and the government and private health sectors are the major responsible agents for the attainment of these goals and objectives, the challenge for the attainment of improved health for all lies in the partnership of all stakeholders in the delivery of health programs and services at all levels, particularly at the grassroots. Collectively and individually, every stakeholder must share in the responsibilities of attaining a healthier and more productive life for all Filipinos.

#### **National Government Agencies**

The *Department of Health* continues as the lead agency for the health sector and convenor of all health stakeholders to ensure strong collaboration for health promotion and disease prevention and control. Through the DOH, the government formulates and enforces national health policies, standards and regulations. It provides the direction and national plans for health programs and services with responsibilities that include:

- Health research and development
- Health surveillance and information system
- Resource generation for priority health services
- Technical assistance and logistics support to local health services
- Human resource capability-building on health
- Health promotion and advocacy
- Direct service delivery for specialized health care
- Health care financing
- Health emergency preparedness and response
- Monitoring, assessment and evaluation of the health situation
- Quality assurance for health care
- Networking for sectoral actions on health

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The concern for health is an integral part of the mandate of several national government agencies and serves to complement DOH policies, standards, regulations and guidelines on health. Impact on the well-being of the individual and safety of the community are important yardsticks in the crafting of national development policies across all sectors. While economic activities generate resources for development, they also create levels of degradation, social decline, inequity and adverse environmental and health impact on the people and the community.

It is not unusual for the DOH to be working in tandem with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) in ensuring the enforcement of laws, rules and regulations concerning the health and safety of workers. Or for that matter with the environment sector in monitoring dwindling safe water supply, and wastes disposal problems and with the tourism sector for other health issues associated with the hospitality and leisure industry. At the same time, the DOH relies on the educational system and government and private communication networks for the promotion of healthy lifestyle and other health-seeking practices.

Several other government agencies are working in tandem with the DOH in providing specific health-related services. The *Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS)* and the *Commission on Higher Education (CHED)* have been in the forefront of health promotion through the integration of health and nutrition education in the school curriculum at all levels. Health programs and services are evident in the maintenance of health clinics in schools that provide first-aid treatment and health counseling at the very least. As a rule, elementary

schools encourage children to avail of preventive health services such as immunization and to practice personal hygiene. The *CHED* in particular plays a big role in the production of health professionals and in setting the curriculum for the health professions.

With the global call for sustainable development, the *Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)* has developed an agenda that recognize the connection of population, resources and environment and the role of the family and community in the dynamics of these relationships. Environmental ordinances, rules and regulations, especially those that impact on public health and safety must pass through a process of public consultation and consensus building. The DENR monitors development trends and enforces control measures to lessen deterioration of communities due to pollution, shortage of water supply, flooding, indiscriminate land conversion and other activities that impact on human health.

The *Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE)* shares with the DOH the interest for the well-being of workers and enforces corresponding rules and regulations (including child labor law), and standards regarding labor and employment-related health issues. It monitors condition in the workplace that impact on occupational health and safety and promotes measures to mitigate them. The agency has grown vigilant against HIV/AIDS and other STDs by promoting their prevention and providing health education in its regular seminars for overseas workers. The agency strongly advocates for the inclusion of family planning and maternal and child health services in the workplace. In promoting these services particularly to industrial work-

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ers, the DOLE puts emphasis on how the practice could contribute in maintaining a healthy workforce and higher productivity.

Integrated to the social services of the *Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)* are health-related services and programs particularly for displaced children (e.g., street children, orphans, children victims of war and violence), women victims of war and violence, the elderly and disabled. The agency maintains shelters for them and coordinates with other government agencies (DOH, DILG, DECS and DOLE among others) for other support services. With the increasing needs of OFWs for psychosocial services, the DSWD has also deployed social workers and counselors to selected Philippine embassies abroad.

The *Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG)* facilitates the implementation of health programs in local government units. In coordination with the LGUs, the DILG is in a position to promote public health through local initiatives and action agenda in their respective local development plans, programs and projects. The DILG is also in the best position to address the root causes of violence and conflict at the LGU level. Peace and order allows the uninterrupted delivery of health and other social services that make for decent living particularly at the grassroots where they are most needed.

The *Department of Agriculture (DA)* serves the needs of the entire population through food production and food security. It also monitors the safety of produce and the harmful effects of wrong food production practices to the health of the people. It enforces standards and regulations for food production from agricultural lands, freshwater and ma-

rine resources. Together with the DOH, *DA* monitors and provides preventive and control measures against food and water-borne organisms and harmful substances in food products that endanger the health of the people.

Health research and development continues to be a major undertaking of the *Department of Science and Technology (DOST)*. It has promoted research on the country's medicinal plants that allow their use as remedies at the community level. It also supports and encourages institutional competence and technical capability building of other agencies to undertake health research through financial grants and training.

Several other agencies of the national government play direct or indirect but pivotal roles in the promotion of health and the prevention and control of diseases. Among these agencies are the *Philippine Information Agency (PIA)*, *Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH)*, *National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA)*, *Department of National Defense (DND)*, *Department of Transportation and Communication (DOTC)*, among others.

### **Local Government Units**

Consistent with local autonomy and decentralization, as mandated by the 1991 Local Government Code, the delivery of basic services and the operation and maintenance of local health facilities are devolved to the provinces, cities and municipalities. Each local government unit is responsible for a minimum set of health services and facilities in accordance with established national policies, guidelines and standards. The devolution of health services conferred to the local government several major functions:

- Formulation and enforcement of local ordinances related to health, nutrition, sanitation, and other health-related concerns
- Implementation of health programs in accordance with national policies, standards and regulations
- Provision of promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative health programs and services
- Operation and maintenance of local health facilities (e.g., district and provincial hospitals under the provincial government; rural health units, health centers and barangay health stations under the municipal or city government)
- Health human resource capability building
- Establishment of a functional local health information system
- Monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of various health services
- Establishment of partnership with all sectors including inter-local government unit collaboration in health promotion
- Provision of funds for health at the local level

### **Academic and Research Institutions**

Government and private academic and research institutions undertake health-related research to strengthen the information base of the health development sector. They also provide excellent centers for the training of health and allied professionals, health education and health promotion. They assist the government in conducting health policy studies, development of models for health financing and information systems and other technical assistance and services.

### **International Organizations**

International organizations provide financial grants and technical assistance for health sector research, human resource capability-building programs, delivery of health services, upgrading of health facilities and other health sector development initiatives.

### **Media**

A well-informed public is more responsive to interventions concerning its health and well-being. For nationwide health information and promotion campaigns, the print and broadcast media are still the most effective in terms of audience reach. For health advocacy, the media also provide the best forum for public debates that are accessible to all stakeholders. A strong public opinion is the best incentive for more informed and responsive decision-making and effective policy-making at the national level.

### **Non-government Organizations (NGO), People's Organizations (PO), and Socio-civic Groups**

They provide broad-based participation to activities that promote responsive health policies and programs. They have the capacity to mobilize communities for health promotion and prevention of risk behaviors and practices, advocate for social action, generate resources at their level, and organize communities for direct service delivery and technical assistance.

### **Business and Labor Groups**

Business and industry should produce goods and services following standards set by the government and ensure product safety especially for human consumption or use. Health and health-related products must be of the highest quality and standard. The sector should also provide safety measures in

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work places and maintain a healthy environment that promotes higher productivity. The business and labor sectors also provide crucial resources for implementing health and health-related activities.

### **Health and Allied Professionals**

They are duty-bound to provide promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative health services and to conduct health education and counseling to their patients. Health professionals provide the frontline services for the health needs of the population.

### **Individuals and Families**

The individual as the primary beneficiary of health services should practice healthy lifestyle and healthy habits (non-smoking and abstinence from alcohol, proper nutrition, physical activity, personal hygiene) and to serve as health advocates to make such interventions effective. Proper health-seeking behavior such as submitting oneself to necessary screening test and immunization must start with the individual. The family should provide health-related support and education to its members, particularly preventive health care and early curative care during time of sickness. Families must work together to promote and ensure healthy home and community environment.

### **Collaboration for Common Action and Interventions for Health**

The implementation of health programs and services must be anchored on the basic principle of collective and individual responsibility. The needs and concerns for specific health issues define the roles and responsibilities of each of the stakeholders. The National Objectives for Health provides the opportunities for partnership and the common grounds for collaboration among government agen-

cies (including academic and research institutions), civil society (NGOs for health, media, international cooperating agencies, business and industry), community and individual beneficiary of health services. Each can serve in any of the following:

- Implementation of national policies and development strategies consistent with the objectives for health and the promotion of improved quality of life
- Mobilization and management of resources for health
- Utilization of available community resources for health
- Dissemination of health information
- Promotion of appropriate technologies for health
- Innovation of indigenous ways and practices on health
- Training of human resource to improve capabilities for health
- Networking and strengthening of institutional linkages
- Practicing healthy lifestyle

Defining the key roles of stakeholders is central to the successful delivery of health services and in achieving the goals for improved health for all. It is also equally important for each stakeholder to help one another in building and strengthening the capacity for health, consolidating efforts at health information and education and generating health financing means and strategies especially at the community level.

The government provides the statutory rules, regulatory mechanisms and command-control measures for health to ensure the well-being of all Filipinos and their access to health services. It mobilizes re-

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sources and other public and private agencies to respond to the needs of the health-seeking population. It provides the infrastructures for health and corresponding manpower. It taps international cooperating agencies and organizations for technical, financial assistance and capability building for health.

Institutions such as media, schools and research organizations are information centers and by their very nature are able to influence behaviors, attitudes and lifestyles and could help advance health-promoting activities and values. They also provide networks and structures for information dissemination, technology transfer, resource sharing, exchange and partnership. They provide information that can be the basis for more responsive health policies and the forum for public debates and consensus building among stakeholders that allow them to contribute in shaping common agenda.

Business and industry groups could also use their expertise and resources for health-related research and production of goods that improve the health of consumers. Processing and production machines, materials and stocks should not endanger the lives and health of workers.

Communities must focus on maintaining healthy environment by protecting water supply from contamination and avoiding indiscriminate throwing of domestic garbage and other human wastes. Existing indigenous health practices, knowledge and skills should be sustained, encouraged or upgraded. The individual as the beneficiary of interventions should have the proper health-seeking attitude and health-promoting lifestyle.

By sharing responsibilities for health, national government agencies, local government units, the private sector as well as communities, families and individuals will all become major stakeholders and contributors towards accomplishing the national goals and objectives for health and attaining our vision of health for all Filipinos.