

Public-private sector partnerships vital for effective and sustainable cancer control programs

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Organized by the Swiss Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines (SwissCham Philippines) on behalf of the Philippine Cancer Society (PCS) and ICanServe Foundation, with the support of Novartis Healthcare Philippines, the roundtable series aims to help meet the World Health Organization (WHO) Global Breast Cancer Initiative (GBCI) targets and motivate stakeholders to support the implementation of the National Integrated Cancer Control Act (NICCA). The ensuing roundtables are scheduled on August 22 and August 31, 2023.

“In line with the NICCA, the public health initiatives of the Department of Health are directed towards building sustainable and responsive health systems that support the delivery of comprehensive cancer care focused on preventive services and disease burden reduction through access to medicines and financing,” said Mr. Vincent Sumergido, Supervising Health Program Officer, DOH Disease Prevention and Control Bureau - Cancer Control Division, who delivered the keynote speech on behalf of Health Secretary Dr. Teodoro Herbosa.

PCS President Dr. Corazon Ngelangel presented their organization’s ACT NOW Breast Cancer Early Detection Program which is currently being piloted in Quezon City with the support of Mayor Joy Belmonte. Dr. Ngelangel reiterated her appeal to the DOH and local government units to consider adopting the program. “We cannot do this alone – we need every stakeholder to act now.”

Ms. Kara Magsanoc-Alikpala, Founding President of ICanServe Foundation, presented their *Ating Dibdibin* breast cancer control program implemented in partner cities which promotes early detection, early diagnosis, access to timely and quality care, supportive care, palliative care and patient navigation. She also highlighted how the Circle of Life data and digital infrastructure of *Ating Dibdibin* in Taguig City generates analytics that can help identify gaps in cancer care and enhance monitoring and evaluation.

Ms. Alikpala revealed that ICanServe is developing and will launch the *Ating Dibdibin* Playbook for local government units who are interested in implementing the program. “Breast cancer is an index disease. If we

can perfect the *Ating Dibdibin* Playbook, we can adopt it for other cancers as well. In fact, our platform gathers data on risk factors for cervical cancer, so even our platform is buildable.” She reiterated her call for the full implementation of the NICCA, and stressed that LGU activation through the enactment of local ordinances is necessary for sustainability of breast cancer control programs.

“Public-private partnerships are important to broaden access to diagnosis, as costly care stems from inaccurate diagnosis and treatment. Incorporating survivorship as a goal in providing holistic personalized treatment exemplifies a patient-centered approach,” said Dr. Conrado Lorenzo III, Chairman, Medical Advisory Council, Healthway Cancer Care Hospital.

The soon-to-open Healthway Cancer Care Hospital is the first dedicated comprehensive cancer hospital in the Philippines committed to improving access to quality affordable cancer care for Filipino patients. The hospital’s Survivorship Program aims to promote the health and wellbeing of patients diagnosed with cancer following completion of initial treatment and beyond.

“The ability to measure outcomes is crucial in providing value-based care and efficient patient-centered services which ultimately result in enhanced patient experience,” said Dr. Manuel Francisco Roxas, Medical Director, AC Health.

“Increasing health literacy improves health outcomes. Conversely, factors that lower health literacy such as misinformation has a negative impact on patient health. Being misled by misinformation doesn’t only result in financial loss, but also loss of time spent on unsubstantiated alternative therapies instead of evidence-based treatment. Being aware of misinformation and recognizing the dangers is the first step in improving health literacy,” said Mr. Joel Chong, Country President, Novartis Healthcare Philippines.

“Building on the key takeaways from the 2023 Southeast Asian Breast Cancer Symposium, we are gathering key stakeholders to galvanize our efforts in promoting early diagnosis and expanding access to treatment which will have far-reaching benefits for patients, their families, and society as a whole. This two-pronged approach is aligned with the WHO Global Breast Cancer Initiative targets that could potentially have a big impact in ensuring a better future for cancer care,” said SwissCham Philippines Chairperson Ms. Christine Fajardo.

Philippine Cancer Society Executive Director Dr. Rachel Rosario, Ms. Alikpala, and Mr. Sumergido issued the “Call to Action: Manifesto of Support for Patient Survivorship”.

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Photo shows (from left) Mr. Joel Chong, Country President Novartis Healthcare Philippines; Dr. Conrado Lorenzo III, Chairman, Medical Advisory Council, Healthway Cancer Care Hospital; Dr. Rachel Rosario, Executive Director, Philippine Cancer Society; Dr. Manuel Francisco Roxas, Medical Director, AC Health; Mr. Vincent Sumergido, Supervising Health Program Officer, DOH Disease Prevention and Control Bureau - Cancer Control Division; Ms. Kara Magsanoc-Alikpala, Founding President, ICanServe Foundation; Kent Marjun Primor, Director of Operations, SwissCham Philippines; Dr. Corazon Ngelangel, President, Philippine Cancer Society; Ms. Jing Castañeda, health advocate and journalist who served as moderator; and Ms. Christine Fajardo, Chairperson, SwissCham Philippines and Communications & Engagement Head, Novartis Philippines & Asia Aspiring Innovative Medicines.

About Philippine Cancer Society (PCS)

The Philippine Cancer Society (PCS) is a private, non-stock, non-profit corporation registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission on 22 December 1956. It was founded by a group of laymen and medical doctors with the aim of “helping the Filipino cope with cancer by preventing it and diminishing death caused by it, especially among the disadvantaged, through information, education, advocacy and focused services.”

About ICanServe Foundation

The ICanServeFoundation is an advocacy group founded in 1999 by four breast cancer survivors led by journalist Kara Magsanoc-Alikpala. Co-founding ICanServe were Crisann Celdran, Becky Fuentes and Bet Lazatin. The four friends saw the need to provide a circle of support for women who were newly diagnosed, women on cancer treatments and women in remission navigating through their “new normal” life. They also saw the need to provide women with information.

ICanServe provides hope and help to women with breast cancer. It promotes and conducts early breast cancer detection programs in local communities providing sustained access to accurate diagnosis, timely treatments and patient navigation. Its network of cancer survivors lights the path for women with cancer towards total healing.

About Swiss Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines

SwissCham Philippines is a non-stock and non-profit organization dedicated to promoting and fostering trade, investment, and economic relations between Switzerland and the Philippines. It provides a platform for Swiss and Philippine businesses to connect and collaborate, providing access to a network of business leaders, experts, and decision-makers.

About Novartis

Novartis is reimagining medicine to improve and extend people's lives. As a leading global medicines company, we use innovative science and digital technologies to create transformative treatments in areas of great medical need. In our quest to find new medicines, we consistently rank among the world's top companies investing in research and development. Novartis products reach more than 750 million people globally and we are finding innovative ways to expand access to our latest treatments. About 105 000 people of more than 140 nationalities work at Novartis around the world. Find out more at www.novartis.com.

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Contact Persons

Christine Fajardo

Corporate Affairs Head

Maribella Grace Sonsona

Communications Manager

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