

IAPB, Perdami, NCSP, VRSP, FHF & Novartis join forces to provide eyecare services during the pandemic

Jan 12, 2022

- *IAPB, Novartis and their Collaboration to Preserve Sight partners came together in a virtual roundtable discussion to share lessons learned and map the way forward in providing eyecare services in Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines during the pandemic.*
- *Key takeaways identified during the “Reimagining Eyecare amid the Pandemic” virtual RTD include the need to localize eyecare approaches with a patient-centered focus and the vital role of technology in eyecare.*

January 12, 2022 – The International Agency for Prevention of Blindness (IAPB), Novartis and their Collaboration to Preserve Sight partners came together in a virtual roundtable discussion to share lessons learned and map the way forward in providing eyecare services in Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines during the pandemic. The partner organizations are Indonesian Community Ophthalmologist Society (INACOS), Indonesian Ophthalmologists Association (Perdami); National Committee for Sight Preservation (NCSP); Vitreo-Retina Society of the Philippines (VRSP); and The Fred Hollows Foundation (FHF).

Key takeaways identified during the “Reimagining Eyecare amid the Pandemic” virtual RTD include the need to localize eyecare approaches with a patient-centered focus and the vital role of technology in eyecare.

Other key takeaways gleaned during the virtual RTD are:

- Collaboration and partnership are critical in achieving eye health goals.
- Outreach activities should be tailored to fit target audience with clear safety protocols; e.g., utilize social media platforms and radio (for audiences without internet), organize community events, etc.
- Be more creative in developing eyecare service delivery models.
- Facilitate access to eyecare services, particularly for vulnerable communities, in order to address inequities exacerbated by the pandemic.
- Strengthening the primary healthcare and referral systems is crucial.
- Ramp up advocacy through collaboration and networking to increase awareness on blindness prevention.

As of December 2021, the Collaboration to Preserve Sight has reached over one million people through awareness initiatives; screened 78,000 patients; detected vision impairment among 11,000 patients; facilitated 7 out of 10 diagnosed patients to seek consultation; treated 6 of 10 patients or over 4,700 patients; launched social media platforms for patient education and screening schedules; and formed external partnerships with over 370 patient and medical organizations, NGOs and policymakers.

“We thank our partners for supporting the achievement of our shared goal of eliminating preventable sight loss and ensuring access to eyecare services despite the pandemic so everyone, everywhere has the best possible chance to reach their full potential,” said Ms. Amanda Davis, Chairperson, IAPB, Western Pacific.

“The pandemic has greatly worsened existing inequalities in access to eyecare services.,” said Dr. Noel Chua, Chairperson, NCSP. “The pandemic forced us to be creative in providing quality and accessible eye care,”

said Dr. Yeni Dwi Lestari, Head of INACOS, Perdami.

“We thank our partners for enabling the Collaboration to Preserve Sight initiative to have a meaningful impact, with 6 out of 10 people in vulnerable communities seeking consultation and receiving treatment despite pandemic restrictions. The initiative demonstrates that intensified screening coupled with innovative patient education facilitates the patient journey to sight preservation,” said Ms. Christine Fajardo, Novartis Asia Cluster & Novartis Philippines Communications & Engagement Head.

“We are deeply grateful and at the same time inspired hearing the different inputs shared by the stakeholders during this forum. We believe that our success can only be measured by the well-being of our fellow countrymen and how well the health system responds to their needs. May this event be an opportunity for all the participants and guests to build closer partnerships and strengthen our collaboration as we learn from each other through this forum,” said Dr. Allandale E. Nacino, Team Lead, Disease Prevention and Control Bureau, Non-Communicable Disease Division-Prevention of Blindness Program, Department of Health (DOH).

“Early detection of visual impairment is important since the pandemic has led to overuse of devices which could have an impact on eye health,” said dr. Elvieda Sariwati, M. Epid, Director of Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases, Indonesia Ministry of Health.

“In the midst of the pandemic, it is important to be resilient, to learn as we go, to be proactive in facing challenges, and to grab every opportunity to improve eyecare,” said Dr. Marie Joan V. Loy, President, VRSP.

“The pandemic will end, but our vision for better eyes for every people will continue,” said Dr Phuc Huynh, Vietnam Cluster Head, FHF.

“Caring for our eye health has become more relevant during the pandemic when almost everyone is spending a lot of time in front of their smartphones and computers,” said Ms. Rebie O. Relator, Executive Director, EYE hEAR Foundation.

“Look beyond and let everyone see that in the dark comes the brighter light along our path,” said Ms. Lyne A. Abanilla, Chief Operating Officer, Physicians for Peace Philippines.

“There was a de-prioritization of eye health during the pandemic. Health facilities were focused on treating COVID-19 patients or increasing vaccination coverage, which resulted in limited access for other patients,” said Dr. Leo DP Cubillan, Director, Philippine Eye Research Institute (PERI).

“Non-COVID patients are afraid to go to hospitals due to fear of infection. It will take time to educate patients to prioritize eye health and resume their eyecare,” said Dr. Duong Ngoc Vinh, Vice Director, Quang Nam Department of Health, Vietnam.



IAPB, Novartis and its Collaboration to Preserve Sight partners came together in a virtual roundtable discussion “Reimagining Eyecare amid the Pandemic” to share lessons learned and map the way forward in providing eyecare services in Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines during the pandemic. Photo shows (top row, from left) Dr. M. Bayu Sasongko, Head of Department of Ophthalmology Gajah Mada University & Coordinator of Young Ophthalmologists, Indonesian Ophthalmologist Association (Perdami); Dr Phuc Huynh, The Fred Hollows Foundation Vietnam Cluster Head; Dr. Duong Ngoc Vinh, Vice Director, Quang Nam Department of Health, Vietnam; Ms. Amanda Davis, Chairperson, International Agency for Prevention of Blindness (IAPB), Western Pacific; Ms. Christine Fajardo, Novartis Asia Cluster & Philippines Communications & Engagement Head; Dr. Peter Paul Ronque, Medical Adviser, Novartis; (middle row, from left) Ms. Rebie O. Relator, Executive Director, EYE hEAR Foundation; Dr. Noel Chua, Chairperson, National Committee for Sight Preservation; Ms. Lyne A. Abanilla, Chief Operating Officer, Physicians for Peace Philippines; Dr. Leo DP Cubillan, Director, Philippine Eye Research Institute; Dr. Yeni Dwi Lestari, Head of Indonesian Community Ophthalmologist Society, Indonesian Ophthalmologists Association (Perdami); (bottom row, from left) Dr. Marie Joan V. Loy, President, Vitreo-Retina Society of the Philippines; Drew Keys, Regional Coordinator, IAPB, Western Pacific; Dr. Allan Nacino, Medical Officer IV, Prevention of Blindness Program Lead; Khalid Ibrahim, Country President, Novartis Indonesia; Dr. Maria Victoria Rondaris. FHF Philippines Country Head.

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