

Indonesia, Philippines & Vietnam: Building on lessons learned to enhance eyecare services beyond COVID-19

Jan 27, 2022

- *Collaboration to Preserve Sight partners from Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines gathered anew in a virtual forum titled “How can 2030 In Sight support eye health beyond Covid?”*
- *Convened by the International Agency for Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) in collaboration with Novartis, the virtual forum aims to consolidate partners’ efforts in building on the key takeaways from the one-year Collaboration to Preserve Sight results.*
- *The Collaboration to Preserve Sight initiative has revealed many opportunities to reshape the whole healthcare system in general and shift health priorities to eyecare services in particular.*

January 27, 2022 – Collaboration to Preserve Sight partners from the Fred Hollows Foundation (Vietnam and Philippines), Vitreo-Retina Society of the Philippines, Perdami (Indonesia), and National Committee for Sight Preservation (Philippines) gathered anew in a virtual forum titled **“How can 2030 In Sight support eye health beyond Covid?”**. Convened by the International Agency for Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) in collaboration with Novartis, the virtual forum aims to consolidate partners’ efforts in building on the key takeaways from the one-year Collaboration to Preserve Sight results.

“2030 In Sight is the IAPB strategic plan to ending avoidable sight loss for the next decade.¹ It takes the evidence and know-how generated over the past 30 years, leverages the significant political momentum that eye health stakeholders have generated and lays out an ambitious approach that will guide their work until 2030 and beyond,” said Ms. Amanda Davis, Chairperson, International Agency for Prevention of Blindness (IAPB), Western Pacific.

Its three key objectives are by 2030, (1) no one experiences unnecessary or preventable sight loss and everyone can achieve their full potential; (2) eyecare and rehabilitation services are accessible, inclusive and affordable to everyone, everywhere, whenever they are needed; and (3) people understand the importance of caring for their own eye health and demand access to services, free from the weight of any social stigma.²

Eyecare challenges during the pandemic

Challenges identified during the initial implementation of the initiative include de-prioritization of eye health, with health facilities focusing on treating COVID-19 patients or increasing vaccination coverage, which resulted in limited access for other patients; non-COVID patients avoiding hospitals due to fear of being infected; and lack of educators to communicate and promote eye health, especially in rural areas.

“The pandemic has greatly worsened existing inequalities in access to eyecare services.”, said Dr. Noel Chua, Chairperson, National Committee for Sight Preservation (NCSP).

Opportunities to enhance eyecare services

On the positive side, the Collaboration to Preserve Sight initiative has revealed many opportunities to reshape the whole healthcare system in general and shift health priorities to eyecare services in particular.

“To this end, eyecare policies need to be innovative and adaptable to different settings and dynamic conditions.”

Strong partnerships with government and other key stakeholders are vital to raise public awareness in eye health and enhance eyecare services,” said Dr Phuc Huynh, Vietnam Cluster Head, The Fred Hollows Foundation.

Eyecare initiatives implemented during the pandemic

As of December 2021, the Collaboration to Preserve Sight initiative has reached 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 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, Asia Cluster Patient Engagement Lead and Corporate Affairs Head for Novartis Healthcare Philippines, Inc.

Based on the learnings from the initiative’s implementation in the three countries during the pandemic, the forum aims to generate recommendations on how to provide equitable access to eyecare services beyond COVID-19 in underserved communities in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. It also seeks to start a policy dialogue on getting national support for eyecare initiatives and recommendations, as well as build alliances with media in communicating recommendations and facilitating concerted action for universal eye health.

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About IAPB

Founded in 1975, the International Agency for Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) is the overarching alliance for the global eye health sector, with more than 150 organizations in over 100 countries working together for a world where everyone has universal access to eye care. IAPB believes in a world in which no one is needlessly visually impaired, where everyone has access to the best possible standard of eye health; and where those with irreparable vision loss achieve their full potential.

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