

**REGIONAL UNIFIED
HEALTH RESEARCH
AGENDA 2017-2022**

REGION VIII

EASTERN VISAYAS



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Region VIII: Eastern Visayas

Introduction

The Philippines is at a turning point where it is slated to reap the benefits of health research investment towards the country's economic, social, and scientific growth (Philippine National Health Research System, 2018). Research has a huge role in the competitive edge of the country to boost its health economy local and abroad. There is huge potential in expanding innovation, health services in the country, and production of health goods, as well as in building the capacity of highly qualified Filipino healthcare managers and researchers. Setting a research agenda is essential to maximize the impact of investments and is regarded as key in strengthening health research systems.

The Philippine National Health Research System, with its goal to enhance health status through health research, generates the National Unified Health Research Agenda (NUHRA) as one of its core areas, alongside ethics, utilization, resource mobilization, system monitoring and evaluation, and capacity building. While the NUHRA serves as the country's template for health research and development efforts, previous evaluations revealed that the Regional Unified Health Research Agenda (RUHRA) was still perceived as more important as it was more relevant to regional problems and gave direction at the regional level (Ramos-Jimenez et al., 2015).

In the development of NUHRA 2017-2022, the Regional Health Research and Development Consortium (RHRDC) of each region was included in the identification process of health research priorities through the conduct of a consultation with other relevant stakeholders. Their inputs, together with technical papers and situationers that defined the national and regional status of health research, were considered as important contributions in the formulation of the NUHRA and RUHRA (Philippine National Health Research System, 2018). The RUHRA presents the identified health research priorities and a contextual analysis of each and should guide researchers and funders alike in the development of more relevant health research in the region for the next six years

Beyond research agenda setting, there is a challenge in equipping health professionals and researchers with good opportunities in an academic environment of innovation and research. Each region should also consider strengthening capacity in the implementation of RUHRA, management of research, and ultimately generating research outputs that can compete in local and global markets.

Recent health research in the region has covered various topics. Projects have looked at mental health, nutrition, and knowledge, attitudes, and practices among others. In the current RUHRA, areas of highest priority are service delivery improvement, communicable diseases,

and maternal and child health. Others such as environmental health, nutrition, health governance, non-communicable diseases, and disaster risk reduction are also included. This document outlines the methods undertaken in the development of RUHRA and the health research priorities identified for Region VIII.

Regional Consultation

The regional consultation was held on 4-5 May 2017 facilitated by the Alliance for Improving Health Outcomes, Inc. A total of 27 participants attended the regional consultation (Annex A). The two-day consultation was broken down into four main activities.

Each participant was provided with a regional consultation package which included the consultation design and program. Technical papers were presented to provide a context on the research and policies of government and multinational agencies. A regional situationer, which described the stakeholders, health research context, and health challenges, issues, gaps, and threats in the region, was also presented.

The research priorities and perceived needs of each representative were raised through small focus group discussions, with participants randomly divided into three groups. All groups proposed possible research topics, which were presented to the plenary by a representative from each group. This activity generated a list of research themes.

To prioritize the generated health research themes, participants were asked to select an appropriate set of criteria. Participants wrote down their preferred criteria on metacards and the facilitator grouped similar criteria in front of the plenary. The selected set of criteria and weights were the following: public health impact (35%), feasibility (30%), ethical acceptability (20%), and collaboration (15%).

The list of topics along with the set criteria were printed and distributed to the participants for scoring. However, it was suggested to simply rank the research topics from one to 21 and average the ranking of the group to develop the priority list. Participants agreed with this suggestion, thus shifting the method of prioritization from scoring based on criteria to ranking of research topics. The final prioritized research areas can be seen in Annex B.

Health Research Priorities of the Region

The research priorities for the Eastern Visayas Region comprise of 21 themes. The top five priorities are: (1) service delivery; (2) communicable diseases; (3) maternal and child health; (4) health technology development; and (5) health care financing. Themes have corresponding specific research topics. These themes and topics are presented below, together with a brief situational analysis or data specific to the region.



Service delivery

Research that assesses the referral system and current programs

In 2015, the region had 1.90 barangay health stations per 10,000 people (Department of Health, 2015). Currently, a local government unit (LGU) scorecard system has been established to measure and monitor the performance of LGUs in implementing and achieving desired outcomes in health sector reforms and national health targets. Specific research topics include:

- a. Rehabilitative or palliative care
- b. Effectiveness of referral system



Communicable diseases

Research on baseline data, risk factors associated with, and utilization of research on communicable diseases

In 2015, among the leading causes of morbidity in the region were acute respiratory infections with 4,527 cases per 100,000 people and tuberculosis (TB) respiratory with 107 cases per 100,000 people. The region also had the second highest rates of measles, with 8.87 cases per 100,000 people, and leptospirosis, with 2.26 cases per 100,000 people, in the country (Department of Health, 2015). Specific research topics include:

- a. TB and other respiratory tract infections
 - i. Prevalence of TB among children
 - ii. Causes of rise of multi-drug resistant (MDR) TB
- b. Diarrheal disease management and control
 - i. Community and household attitudes and practices towards preventing diarrhea
- c. Dengue vector control
 - i. Bioassay and insecticide-resistance
- d. Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
 - i. Sexual health of men having sex with men
 - ii. Social stigma
- e. Schistosomiasis
 - i. Assessment and utilization of research conducted
- f. Capillariasis
 - i. Prevalence and incidence in Region VIII



Maternal and child health

Research on effectiveness of interventions for maternal and child health issues

In 2015, only 59.13% of pregnant women had four or more prenatal visits. Additionally, only 74.89% of children were fully immunized in 2015 (Department of Health, 2015). Specific research topics include:

- a. Child
 - i. Child development of antibodies from immunizable vaccines
 - ii. Eye health
 - iii. Attitude of Filipinos on vaccination
 - iv. Incidence of congenital anomalies
- b. Maternal health
 - i. Effectiveness of halfway house in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas
 - ii. Effectiveness of Basic Emergency Obstetric and Newborn Care training on maternal mortality ratio
 - iii. Lifestyle and pregnancy



Health technology development

Research on development of new devices, drugs, and other health technologies

Technological advancement and innovation have led to the discovery and isolation of genes and other biological molecules associated with certain diseases. The region aims to conduct research work on the development of new diagnostic devices, drugs, and utilization of other health technologies. Specific research topics include:

- a. Functional foods
- b. Drug discovery
 - i. Molecular analysis for drug discovery
 - ii. Drug discovery for cancer
- c. Hospital equipment and biomedical devices
 - i. Diagnostics
- d. Information and communications technology in health
 - i. Geographic information system-based mapping for outbreak monitoring and surveillance



Health care financing

Research on policy gaps and impact assessment of health financing programs

In 2016, there were a total of 4.2 million PhilHealth beneficiaries in the region (PHIC, 2017). Research efforts should aim to assess the impact of health financing programs in the region and identify policy gaps. Specific research topics include:

- a. PhilHealth services and costs
- b. Medical assistance fund utilization



Health governance

Research that assesses impact of policies and programs, including 4Ps and Inter-Local Health Zones

In 2015, the region had 1.90 barangay health stations per 10,000 people (Department of Health, 2015). In this system, the prioritization and provision of health services in LGUs are dependent on their respective local chief executives. Currently, an LGU scorecard system has been established to measure and monitor the performance of LGUs in implementing and achieving desired outcomes in health sector reforms and national health targets. Specific research topics include:

- a. Impact assessment of health-related policies and programs
- b. Impact of *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino* Program to health outcome indicators
- c. Inter-Local Health Zone (ILHZ)
 - i. Effectiveness of implementation process applied by development management officers on local health systems development on ILHZs



Health knowledge management

Research that assesses and develops the current knowledge management system in the region

Inadequate information can hamper evidence-based policy-making and program formulation activities. Research efforts should aim to assess the local information management system and develop new mechanisms for a better information management system. Specific research topics include:

- a. Assessment of health-related indicators in existing community-based management information system
- b. Surveillance of reported infectious and non-infectious diseases



Environmental health

Research on water safety and quality and waste management, including policy development and impact

In 2015, 90.02% of households in the region had access to improved and safe water supplies. In the same year, 75.95% of households had sanitary toilets; only 52.18% had satisfactory methods of disposing solid waste; and only 59.26% had access to complete basic sanitation facilities (Department of Health, 2015). Specific research topics include:

- a. Water, sanitation, and hygiene implementation assessment (impact for policy development)
- b. Waste disposal and management of Region VIII
- c. Water quality and potability in Region VIII



Lifestyle diseases

Research on risk factors leading to lifestyle diseases

In 2015, urinary tract infections were the fifth leading cause of morbidity with 437 cases per 100,000 people in the region. Other non-communicable disease listed as leading causes of morbidity in the same year were hypertension and diseases of the heart (Department of Health, 2015). Specific research topics include:

- a. Genito-urinary diseases (kidney and urinary problem)
- b. Genito-urinary diseases among children
 - i. Chips consumption as a risk factor for urinary tract infection among school children in Tacloban City
- c. Prevalence of gout among fisherfolks in Tacloban City



DRRM and CCA

Research on the risk of climate change, assessments of current strategies, and capacity for health emergencies

In 2014, 31 disaster incidents struck the region and affected 2.5 million residents. In 2015, a tropical cyclone affected 18,000 people (UNOCHA, 2017). The region has identified a need to conduct research addressing the health effects of disasters and climate change. Specific research topics include:

- a. Effects and risk of climate change to all ages
- b. Assessment of climate change adaptation (CCA) strategies
- c. Nutrition in emergencies
- d. Hospital capacity assessment on health emergency management



Reproductive health and family planning

Research on implementation and acceptability of strategies to prevent early pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections

A survey in 2013 found that 61.7% of married women used contraception with 37% using modern methods and 24.8% used traditional methods. The more commonly used modern methods were pills, with 21.1%, and female sterilization, 7.8% (Philippine Statistics Authority and ICF International, 2014). Specific research topics include:

- a. Family planning
 - i. Factors affecting acceptability of family planning method
- b. Adolescent sexual reproductive health
 - i. Increase incidence of HIV among young people in Region VIII
- c. Human sexuality education
 - i. Assessment on the implementation of human sexuality education



Nutrition

Research on nutritional issues in children and adults, including obesity and malnutrition

In 2013, of children ages 0-5 years old in the region, 21.7% were underweight and 36.8% were stunted; both were higher than the national prevalence of 19.9% and 30.3% respectively. In the same year, 7.8% were wasted and 3.2% were overweight (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2015). Specific research topics include:

- a. Obesity in children (practices and attitude)
- b. Malnutrition and other nutrition-related health problems
- c. Factors affecting high incidence of hyperthyroidism



Mental health problems

Research on epidemiology of and service delivery for mental health

With the recent passage of the Mental Health Bill on third and final reading, the topic is increasingly gaining traction and more opportunities for funding. Research efforts should aim to address knowledge gaps in the epidemiologic pattern, service delivery and rehabilitation of mental health. Specific research topics include:

- a. Depression and suicide
 - i. Incidence and factors of depression in adolescents
- b. Post-traumatic disorders
- c. Mental retardation, children with special needs
- d. Mental health in workplace (harassment, bullying)
- e. Health effects of computer games addiction



Health infrastructure

Research on health infrastructure needs and implementation of infrastructure strengthening programs

In 2015, the region had only two barangay health stations for every 10 barangays (Department of Health, 2015). The region aims to explore health infrastructure needs and factors affecting implementation of health infrastructure projects in the region. Specific research topics include:

- a. Factors associated with slow implementation of Health Facility Enhancement Program projects in LGUs



Traditional and alternative health medicine

Clinical research on traditional and alternative medicines for lifestyle and other diseases

Herbal medicine is often used in various diseases due to its accessibility and affordability as compared to modern pharmacological products. The region has identified a need to conduct research on the potential of traditional and alternative medicine in treating lifestyle and other diseases. Specific research topics include:

- a. Clinical researches on homeopathy
- b. Clinical researches on acupuncture for pain, substance addiction
- c. Clinical researches on naturopathy, ayurveda and anthroposcopic medicine
- d. Adjunctive treatment for cancer, diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and cardiovascular disease



Health promotion

Research on health promotion, information, education, and communication gaps

The World Health Organization defines health promotion as a strategy of equipping people with the knowledge necessary to make positive health decisions. The region aims to address knowledge gaps in health promotion and education in the community. Specific research topics include:

- a. Effectiveness of information, education, and communication materials in health promotion



Health regulation

Research that evaluates implementation of regulatory policies and compliance to regulation

The region has identified a need to evaluate the implementation of regulatory policies and assess the compliance of regional stakeholders to regulations. Specific research topics include:

- a. Compliance to hospital standards
- b. Food and drug administration
 - i. Study on the use of rate of selected antibiotics in Tacloban City
 - ii. Presence of pharmacist in licensed drug establishments
 - iii. Practice of medication counselling skills
 - iv. Dispensing of antibiotics without prescription
 - v. Adverse drug reporting by health practitioner



Drug and substance abuse

Research on prevalence of and perceptions on drug abuse and quality of life of drug surrenderers

In the current political climate, addressing substance or drug abuse concerns is a national priority and thus may recognizably receive more support from the government. Specific research topics include:

- a. Drug surrenderers quality of life
- b. Perceptions on drug abuse and trafficking
- c. Prevalence of drug abuse among different age groups in the region



Gender and development

Research on gender issues, health policies, practices, and violence against all genders and sexualities

A survey in 2013 found that 23% of women ages 15-49 had experienced physical violence since the age of 15. In the same survey, 6% reported having experienced sexual violence (Philippine Statistics Authority and ICF International, 2014). Specific research topics include:

- a. Gender and development issues and policies on health and health-related practices
- b. Violence against men, women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, and children



Geriatrics

Research on baseline data on health issues of the elderly and corresponding health programs and interventions

In 2010, 8.2% of the region's population was composed of senior citizens who were at least sixty years old (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2015). This increased to 8.6% in 2015. In the same year, there were 41 welfare institutions in the region with a total of 31 residents aged 60 and over. There is a need to collect baseline data on the aging population in the region and assess current health services for the elderly. Specific research topics include:

- a. Prevalence and incidence studies on diseases of the elderly
 - i. Accidents or trauma
 - ii. Dementia

- b. Longevity of life for the aged
- c. Healthy aging programs
- d. Quality of life for the elders
- e. Palliative (hospice) care
- f. Home health care



Disability

Research to address knowledge gaps on vulnerable populations for an inclusive health system

In 2010, 1.75% or 71,575 of the household population in the region were persons with disability (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2015). The region aims to address the knowledge gap on special groups and vulnerable populations for a more inclusive health system. Specific research topics include:

- a. Stroke (quality of life post stroke, patient and recovery vis–a-vis compliance)

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Annex A: Participants of regional consultation

Name	Position	Affiliation
Karen Tolentino	Information Officer	Commission on Population (POPCOM)
Minerva Molon	Director IV	Department of Health (DOH) Regional Office (RO) VIII
Paula Sydiongco	Director III	DOH RO VIII
Leonido Olobia	Medical Technologist IV	DOH RO VIII
Mary Joyce Hebrío	Universal Health Care Implementer	DOH RO VIII
Josephine Hipe	Special Operations Officer III	DOH Philippine Institute of Traditional and Alternative Health Care (PITAHC)
Edgardo Esperancilla	Regional Director	Department of Science and Technology (DOST) RO VIII
Ernesto Granada	Assistant Regional Director	DOST RO VIII
Lucia Dauz	Science Research Specialist (SRS) II	DOST RO VIII
Joy Sunneth Bacalla	SRS I	DOST RO VIII
Jeffrey Hinampos	Communications Officer I	DOST RO VIII
Pamela Poleno	Project Assistant I	DOST RO VIII
Dominic Aty		DOST RO VIII
Ray Dominic Ladera	Instructor I	Eastern Samar State University
Jac Borromeo	Medical Specialist IV	Eastern Visayas Regional Medical Center
Nestor Sepanza	Vice President for Research and Extension	Leyte Normal University
Jing Garcia	Chaplain	Liceo del Verbo Divino (LVD)
Resurreccion Enage	Senior Economics Development Specialist	National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) RO VIII
Nino Laborro	Nutrition Officer III	National Nutrition Council
Kristine Navarrete	Secretary	Philippine Association of Medical Technologies, Inc. - Eastern Visayas Chapter (PAMET-EVC)
Olivia Gardenas	Midwife III	Philippine League of Government and Private Midwives, Inc. (PLGPMI) and City Health Office
Eduardo Vina	Provincial Health Officer II	Provincial Health Office Southern Leyte
Liza Modesto	Midwife IV	Provincial Health Office
Alejandro Lucban	Provincial Health Officer I	Provincial Health Office – Eastern Samar
Veronica Reonora	SRS II	Southern Leyte State University

Name	Position	Affiliation
Gracia Varona	Faculty	UP Visayas – Tacloban College
Maryflor Castro	OIC Dean	University of Eastern Philippines

Annex B: Results of priority scoring

Rank	Topic	Final score
1	Service delivery	75
2	Communicable disease	90
3	Maternal and child health	97
4	Health technology development	112
5	Health care financing	115
6	Health governance	119
7	Health knowledge management	119
8	Environmental health	124
9	Lifestyle diseases	124
10	Disaster risk reduction and management and climate change adaptation	130
11	Reproductive health and family planning	139
12	Nutrition	147
13	Mental health problems	150
14	Health infrastructure	150
15	Traditional and alternative health medicine	155
16	Health promotion	159
17	Health regulation	168
18	Drug and substance abuse	168
19	Gender and development	176
20	Geriatrics	194
21	Disability	206



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