

Novartis partner organizations carry out vision screening and eye health education in several provinces

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- FHF, VRSP, and NCSP are part of the Collaboration to Preserve Sight, a multistakeholder campaign that aims to provide free screenings and patient education for early diagnosis of retinal disorders, eye and cataract diseases in Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

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In the Philippines, vision impairment and blindness have a prevalence rate of 1.98%. This represents around 1.11 million Filipinos with cataract, about 400,000 with uncorrected error of refraction, almost 300,000 with glaucoma, and around 200,000 with maculopathy/diabetic retinopathy (DR). Additionally, there are over 4 million Filipinos living with undiagnosed eye problems that need to be addressed.¹

FHF, VRSP, and NCSP are part of the Collaboration to Preserve Sight, a multistakeholder campaign that aims to provide free screenings and patient education for early diagnosis of retinal disorders, eye and cataract diseases in Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines. The three countries were selected based on disease burden, low diagnosis rate, screening gaps in the healthcare system, and large population. The Collaboration to Preserve Sight aims to reach 2.2 million patients who will benefit from education and screening programs; facilitate 30,000 patients to go on to consultations and potentially treatment following screenings; and partner with 66 national and regional advocacy organizations to promote patient education and facilitate vision screening despite the pandemic.

“Novartis is privileged to partner with IAPB [International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness], FHF, VRSP, NCSP, and other local organizations in our shared goal of expanding equitable access to eye care in remote communities with the initiation of early detection through eye health screening programs,” said Mr. Jugo Tsumura, President and Managing Director, Novartis Healthcare Philippines, Inc.

“The Fred Hollows Foundation has collaborated with the Department of Health in its Community Eye Health Program since 2013. This program has empowered various provinces to take eye health a priority as part of their local development. We are indeed happy to be part of nation building through the foundation’s blindness prevention activities,” said Dr. Maria Victoria Rondaris, Country Manager, FHF Philippines.

“With our Mulat Mata Project, the Vitreo-Retina Society of the Philippines chose to focus on diabetic retinopathy, one of the leading causes of blindness worldwide. We aim to save the vision of millions of Filipinos through education, early detection, and timely treatment,” said VRSP President Dr. Marie Joan V. Loy.

“NCSP partner stakeholders will continue to commit our work and services to the marginalized communities enabled by our national August Sight Saving Month campaign, “Maging MATAalino, Magpa-TSEKAP Now Na”. With the assistance of Novartis and in support for the Department of Health, IAPB, and World Health Organization, we will increase awareness on the importance of eye health,” said NCSP Chairperson Dr. Noel Chua.

“We pledged to address eye screening gaps in the country and strengthened our commitment to the Global Elimination of Avoidable Blindness: Vision 2020 – The Right to Sight,” said Dr. Beverly Lorraine Ho, Director, DOH Health Promotion and Communication Service (OIC).

“Novartis is pleased to work with our Collaboration to Preserve Sight partner stakeholders. We are committed to achieve our shared goal of promoting community-based vision screening and treatment to help prevent vision impairment and blindness in underserved areas in Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines,” said Ms. Christine Fajardo, Asia Cluster Patient Engagement Head and Corporate Affairs Head for Novartis Healthcare Philippines, Inc.

Vision screening, eye health education

Aiming to sustain vision screening and eye health awareness during the Covid-19 pandemic, FHF partnered with the Provincial Government to set up the DOH Community Eye Health Program and reach Filipino families from Quezon, Oriental Mindoro, Antique, and Negros Oriental. From October 2020 to April 2021, FHF targeted the most marginalized communities such as indigenous people and geographically displaced island and mountain communities selected by the DOH based on poverty level and high number of untreated cataract cases. FHF also partnered with private ophthalmologists and optometrists to provide treatment in eye centers.

FHF launched the Lusog Mata online platform, which features a series of infographics and videos on detecting eye health conditions with the aid of simple vision screening tests hosted on a mobile app called Peek Vision. The innovative online platform enabled parents to conduct continued vision screening of their children and referral to partner optometrists. The Lusog Mata Facebook page highlights patient education infographics and videos.

Through the FHF Lusog Mata initiative, more than two and a half million individuals have increased awareness on the importance of eye health and vision screening; over 73,000 underwent vision screening; more than 8,000 were referred for treatment; over 3,500 individuals with error of refraction were given eyeglasses; and nearly 70 individuals with cataract, glaucoma and other eye problems were referred to government hospitals for treatment.

Diabetic retinopathy screening

Starting January 2021 with target completion on December 2022, VRSP is setting up an extensive diabetic retinopathy (DR) awareness and screening program at the community level in the province of Bulacan. However due to the surge in Covid-19 cases in Bulacan, VRSP had to temporarily defer in-person DR screening. The organization focused on educating type 2 diabetes patients by disseminating digital brochures on DR and its complications through the VRSP website, Facebook page, and Viber group.

Infomercials on DR were played on radio stations and patient education infographics were posted on the social media platforms of local government units, Philippine Academy and Ophthalmology (PAO), and other partner organizations. These activities are part of the VRSP Mulat Mata awareness project. A virtual lay forum on YouTube and Facebook was conducted with barangay health workers, municipal health officers and general practitioners as resource persons and participants. The recorded video of the lay forum was posted on the VRSP website, FB page, and YouTube channel.

VRSP is gathering the latest data on the number of type 2 diabetes patients in Bulacan to update the existing 2018 data. A mobile DR Screening protocol has been finalized and VRSP is working with the Philippine Eye Research Institute (PERI), the agency that will conduct the screening in Bulacan.

Online vision screening of children

In April 2021, NSCP in partnership with PERI pilot-tested their online vision screening program in Benedicto Primary School in Pampanga and Langka Integrated School in Bulacan, benefiting 35 kindergarten pupils.

As soon as quarantine restrictions are eased, NSCP in partnership with EYE hEAR Foundation, Inc. will conduct school screening among kindergarten and vision screening training of teachers in Region 8 using the PERI screening kit. The DOH will select 12 public schools: 5 in Leyte, 6 in Samar, and 1 in Biliran. They will use PERI's screening kit. Children with eye problems will be referred to eye centers for treatment.

Collaboration to Preserve Sight programs and initiatives

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