

PhilHealth's outpatient primary care package through the years

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Received
23 September 2025

Accepted
16 December 2025

Published online
December 18, 2025

Cite as
Managbanag LT, Caputol CC. PhilHealth's outpatient primary care package through the years. *SPMC J Health Care Serv.* 2025;11(2):4. <https://n2t.net/ark:/76951/jhcs379enn>

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PhilHealth's outpatient benefits have evolved over time, particularly with the implementation of the Universal Health Care (UHC) Act, transitioning from basic packages to more comprehensive primary care services.

In 2007, an outpatient package for Overseas Filipino Workers, called Outpatient Benefit Package (OPB) for Overseas Workers Program (OWP) Members, was introduced. This package included consultations and diagnostic tests in accredited DOH hospitals, often with a zero co-pay system.¹ In 2012, the Primary Care Benefit 1 (PCB1) Package was implemented, in support of the Aquino Health Agenda, which aimed to provide UHC for all Filipinos—particularly the poor and vulnerable—equitable access to essential primary and preventive health care services. The beneficiaries of PCB1 included not only OWP members but also Sponsored Program members, and Organized Groups members, and their qualified dependents.² In 2014, the Tamang Serbisyo para sa Kalusugan ng Pamilya (TSeKaP) sought to expand PCB1 to include additional diagnostic tests and medicines for conditions with a high burden of disease, covering not only the previous beneficiaries of PCB1 but also the teaching and non-teaching personnel of the Department of Education.^{3 4} However, it was officially deferred in November 2015.⁵ In 2018, PCB1 was expanded—now termed as Expansion of the Primary Care Benefit (EPCB)—to include members from the “Formal Economy (employed), Lifetime Members, and Senior Citizens in PhilHealth-accredited public and private facilities such as Level 1, 2, and 3 hospitals, infirmaries or primary care facilities, ambulatory surgical clinics, and medical outpatient clinics.”⁶

More recently, significant updates and expansions have taken place, particularly with the enactment of the UHC Law in 2019, which broadened population coverage and prioritized comprehensive outpatient and primary care services, including medical consultations, diagnostic tests, and outpatient drug benefits.⁷ In line with the UHC Law, PhilHealth integrated PCB1 and EPCB Packages into the PhilHealth Konsultasyong

Sulit at Tama (PhilHealth Konsulta), which now covers all Filipinos.⁸

The PhilHealth Konsulta package is an expanded primary care benefit that offers registered members access to primary care services, including consultations, health screenings, and essential medicines. This program aims to provide affordable and accessible outpatient health care services, promoting early diagnosis and prompt treatment of various illnesses. It serves as an interim UHC program of PhilHealth for all Filipinos. PhilHealth also developed eKonsulta, a standalone web application that Konsulta facilities can utilize as a temporary electronic reporting system. It allows providers to encode patient data, including diagnoses, diagnostic procedures and results, and prescribed or dispensed medicines.⁸

Recently, PhilHealth issued Circular No. 2024-0013 to improve the PhilHealth Konsulta Benefit Package, incentivize providers to deliver primary care service, and promote broader screening for the early detection of chronic diseases, including breast cancer. This issuance has been revised three times to reflect important policy updates, as seen in PhilHealth Circular Nos. 2022-0005, 2023-0013, and 2024-0002.⁹

The main goals of the PhilHealth Konsulta are to ensure accessible primary care through a flexible financing approach for delivering primary care services, and to establish guidelines on primary care provider registration, benefit availment, payment mechanisms, reporting rules, and performance evaluation. The policy covers all payments for select primary care services and goods obtained in accredited Konsulta Package Providers (KPPs) as part of the implementation of the Comprehensive Outpatient Benefit Package or Konsulta+.¹⁰ Its main goal is to provide more affordable and accessible health care services to the poorest Filipinos.⁹

The key features of PhilHealth Konsulta Benefit Package include: free medical consultations for registered members with primary care providers in accredited KPPs for health monitoring and maintenance; health



risk screening and assessment to identify potential health risks; access to select laboratory and diagnostic services; and the provision of essential medicines for common health conditions. KPPs are required to deliver preventive health services such as health screenings and assessments, primary consultations—including counseling on family planning, smoking cessation, medication adherence, and regular monitoring for both communicable and non-communicable diseases—based on the life stages and health risks of individuals in their service area.⁹

The first patient encounter (FPE), which is the initial contact with the primary care provider where essential health information of qualified beneficiaries are recorded to determine the health risks of each member, may be conducted by the KPP or other eligible health workers (e.g., barangay health workers, nurses and midwives in barangay health stations, medical clerks or interns, nurses in on-site clinics, physicians, or any duly trained allied medical or health support staff) under the accredited KPP. The maximum per capita rate for every member is P1,700 annually. The first tranche, or FPE payment, represents 40% (PHP 680) of the per capita rate. The KPP receives this amount in full based on the number of members registered with FPE, provided that the KPP has conducted at least one medical consultation for the member within the previous year. The second tranche, which represents the remaining 60% (PHP 1,020), is determined by the number of registered beneficiaries with validated FPE and the extent to which the KPP meets its year-end performance targets. These performance indicators include the number of primary care consultations, utilization of laboratory services, and the dispensing of antibiotics and maintenance medications for non-communicable diseases.⁹

KPPs generally view the program positively for its intent and its potential to help more patients. However, they face considerable challenges, particularly delayed reimbursements, administrative burdens, and limited resources.^{11 12}

PhilHealth Konsulta was piloted in Aklan and Guimaras in 2020 and expanded to other provinces in the Western Visayas the following year.¹³ In July 2021, Davao City began implementing PhilHealth Konsulta,

reaching 18 accredited KPPs—all district health centers—by the end of December.¹⁴ Southern Philippines Medical Center (SPMC) later became accredited as a KPP on November 2, 2022, initially serving hospital personnel and eventually extending services to outpatients. Over time, SPMC registered a large number of beneficiaries, serving not only nearby residents but also those living farther away who were not yet enrolled in other health facilities. This enabled the institution to increase revenue by maximizing capitation rates, meeting performance targets, improving service utilization, ensuring timely reimbursements, and ensuring that FPEs are thoroughly documented.

While SPMC has successfully implemented PhilHealth Konsulta to a considerable extent, the program continues to face key challenges common to many KPPs. First, KPPs struggle to secure FPEs and register beneficiaries due to low awareness,^{15 16} with many members unaware of the need to register with a specific KPP or unaware that they are already registered elsewhere. System and digital issues—such as outdated or unverified dependent information requiring action from the main PhilHealth Office—add inconvenience for patients and administrative burden for providers.¹⁷ Second, concerns have emerged over access to and transmission of patient data due to connectivity problems in PhilHealth's or a KPP's eKonsulta system, which affect downloading of masterlists and reliable submission of required data.¹⁸ Handling sensitive patient information also raises security and privacy risks. Third, many KPPs report inadequate coverage,¹⁶ because capitation rates fall short of the actual cost of providing the full primary care package,¹⁹ pushing patients to rely on other government health financing schemes for essential diagnostic tests and medicines. Lastly, claim verification issues—including data discrepancies between member records name and the PhilHealth database,²⁰ as well as delays in posting and generating masterlists due to PhilHealth system errors¹⁸—can impede capitation payments. At SPMC specifically, members also report being unable to choose their provider. Those enrolled elsewhere cannot transfer to the SPMC KPP within the same year, even when their assigned provider does not meet their needs.

Issues in implementing PhilHealth Kon-

sulta in SPMC may be addressed by strengthening client education, improving health care worker training, and enhancing communication channels. Upgrading both Philhealth's and SPMC's eKonsulta systems can improve operational efficiency, while policy adjustments—especially on the Konsulta allotment—can help ensure adequate coverage. Establishing strategic access points in nearby KPPs can support member verification, and stronger government and non-government partnerships can further streamline operations.

To address the gaps in PhilHealth Konsulta's implementation and coverage, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. launched the PhilHealth Yaman ng Kalusugan Program (YAKAP) on July 25, 2025 in Quezon City.²¹ YAKAP expands Konsulta by broadening primary care services and emphasizing health promotion and prevention. It offers 13 laboratory tests and additional cancer screening procedures that include upper abdominal, pelvic and breast ultrasounds, mammography, alpha fetoprotein testing, liver ultrasound, colonoscopy, and low-dose chest CT.²² The number of covered medicines has increased from 21 to 75,²³ ²⁴ with each member entitled to free medicines worth up to PHP 20,000.00 annually. Of the covered medicines, 54 are available through Guaranteed and Accessible Medications for Outpatient Treatment (GAMOT) Facilities, and 21 through YAKAP Clinics based on the original Konsulta Package.²⁵ ²⁶ PhilHealth implemented GAMOT in November 2023 as an outpatient drug benefit package to enhance access to essential medicines for Filipinos and reduce their out-of-pocket expenses.²⁷ As of October 31, 2025, there are 3,903 YAKAP Clinics accredited nationwide.²⁸ SPMC is transitioning to YAKAP and submitted accreditation requirements in October 2025.

With YAKAP's rollout, the country's health system is moving toward preventive care, supporting longer life expectancy, reduced health care costs from treating advanced illnesses, and improved public health.

Contributors

LTM and CCC conceptualized the article. LTM, and CCC wrote the original draft. All authors performed the subsequent revisions, approved the final version, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of this article.

Article source

Commissioned

Peer review

External

Competing interests

None declared

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