

Message during the Urban Nutrition Governance Project Launch  
July 10, 2019, Makati City

By DOH Assistant Health Secretary Maria Rosario Vergeire, M.D.

It is my pleasure to be here today to celebrate a very special partnership that will have a great impact on the way nutrition services are delivered to the communities in the cities of Puerto Princesa, Tagum, and Tacurong. This project is a contribution to the base of interventions that highlight the interaction between health and nutrition in the first 1,000 days of life, and how it prevents or leads to non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and socioeconomic productivity of children in their adult years. NCDs are reflective of earlier nutrition habits, such as diabetes mellitus and hypertension. The expanded National Nutrition Survey's (NNS's) 2018 results show that although there has been a drop in the prevalence of increased blood pressure in adults—from twenty four (23.9) percent in 2015 to nineteen (19.2) percent in 2018, there is an increase of high fasting blood sugar levels in adults from five (5.2) percent in 2015 to eight (8.2) percent in 2018. Also, the ENNS 2018 showed that stunting prevalence remains high.

Stunting doubles at one year of age, coinciding with the transition to complementary feeding period. This is a major public health issue that has gone unnoticed for many years or decades to be exact, and this affects the psychosocial and physical development of children by negatively influencing their performance in school, in their social circles, and—later on—their economic productivity as part of the workforce.

Eliminating all forms of malnutrition is a priority of the government. We are now fully aware that this endeavor requires a keen understanding and aggressive focus on nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions, and understanding the gaps in governance, service delivery, and monitoring of implementation progress. To refine our strategies in the light of Republic Act 11148. Also known as the Kalusugan at Nutrition ng mga Mag-Nanay Act of 2018: the Department, with support from UNICEF, is commissioning a study which will use robust evidence provided by the National Nutrition Survey and local longitudinal studies, such as the Cebu Longitudinal Health and Nutrition Survey, which began in 1983, the Quezon Province F1K Program, and NEDA-UNFPA's Longitudinal Cohort Study on the Girl and Boy Child, approved in 2017. These studies, along with the study of current governance and service delivery practices in all levels of government, aims to predict the trend of malnutrition and stunting in the country, and form models that would help the government and its partners achieve its goals in

reducing stunting and malnutrition significantly. With all the forthcoming data and new-found evidence. The DOH- NNC (Department of Health – National Nutrition Council), together with our partners is set to develop a strategic framework for the First 1000 days, and subsequently review and revise the PPAN (Philippine Plan of Action for Nutrition) for alignment. We expect that after PPAN updating. All local Nutrition Plans will be re-directed.

RA 11148 and its IRR (implementing rules and regulations) consolidate health and nutrition service packages into a compendium of primary care, nutrition, and psychosocial development services for mothers and children, including guidance from the PPAN for all levels of governance-under universal health care principles. The PPAN, developed under the leadership of the National Nutrition Council, with technical assistance from Nutrition International, provides a roadmap on how to address urgent nutritional challenges faced by the Philippines population, including: wasting, stunting and micronutrient deficiencies in children, and overweight in children and adults. The strategies included ensures that integrated and comprehensive services are present and provided where it is most needed – particularly for women and children in geographically isolated areas hazard and conflict zones, indigenous communities, and communities with vulnerable and poor populations.

In order for RA 11148 to be successfully implemented, it is critical to support local governments in their ability to provide services efficiently. It requires a whole of government approach in collaboration with civil society organizations and private sector, to work together to fulfill the intent of the law towards equitable access to health and nutrition programs-which is the core of Universal Health Care (UHC). As we embark to implement the NNC in the coming years. We commit to adhere to UHC's core principles of integrations, comprehensiveness of services, equitable, and using the whole of government approach. This is precisely what this urban nutrition governance project will be doing. It will bring together the respective expertise, experience, and strengths in governance and program management of the government, Nutrition International, and the Zuellig Family Foundation-and leverage these for tangible results on improving health and nutrition outcomes.

We like to commend the efforts of our local governments of Puerto Princesa, Tagum, and Tacurong, who recognize the importance of good leadership and governance as the platform for equitable, comprehensive, integrated, and continuous good quality health services. I reiterate the support of the Department of Health, the NNC and other members of the NNC Governing Board to Local Government Units in helping to ensure that adequate technical capacities for program planning are available, and that investment are appropriated and allocated.

We want to thank Nutrition International and the Zuellig Family Foundation for their commitment to supporting our government's efforts to eliminate all forms of malnutrition, especially in the implementation of the First 1,000 days strategy. We especially give our thanks to Nutrition International, a close ally, for its continued support to the development of, implementation of and now operationalized PPAN.

We also want to express our gratitude to the government of Canada for its financial support for Right Start as well as this urban nutrition governance partnership. This support enables Nutrition International to implement the Right Start initiative in forty-seven (47) municipalities in seven (7) provinces since 2016. This program aims to prevent and control anemia in pregnant woman and young children and low birth weight in newborns, and to avert deaths in infants and children under five (5).

We are also delighted to be working with Zuellig Family Foundation. ZFF has built a solid reputation for its work with local government units through leadership and governance, and the commitment to contribute to improvements in health and nutrition outcomes from the First 1,000 Days strategy.

Our government is looking forward to this new found commitment and hope, and thru strong and effective partnership, we will be able to eventually address malnutrition and its effect to our most vulnerable members of the society.

On behalf of Honorable Francisco Duque III, Maraming Salamat, at mabuhay tayong lahat.