

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

News and Information Bureau

**MALACAÑANG PRESS BRIEFING HOSTED BY MS. DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ WITH DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
SECRETARY TED HERBOSA**

DECEMBER 3, 2024 [3:50 P.M. – 4:16 P.M.]

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Magandang hapon, Malacañang Press Corps, and welcome sa ating press briefing ngayong araw, December 3.

At the cabinet sectoral meeting this afternoon, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. convened the health sector to provide an update on the Philippine Plan of Action for nutrition and the Firsts One Thousand Days Program. President Marcos directed the relevant agencies including the Department of Health, Department of Education, Department of Agriculture and others to consolidate the ongoing feeding efforts into a strong and impactful National Nutrition Program.

The Philippines is experiencing a triple burden of malnutrition – these include undernutrition, micronutrient deficiency and over nutrition or obesity. The Department of Health reported that the Philippines is among the countries with the highest prevalence of stunting or malnutrition in the East Asia and Pacific Region. The consequences of this include low performance at school, economic cost due to mortality and productivity losses and increased infant mortality.

President Marcos recognizes that nutrition is a multi-faceted problem that needs a multi-sectoral approach led by the national government.

And to tell us more about the Marcos administration's programs to improve nutrition governance, we are joined by DOH Secretary Ted Herbosa. Good afternoon, Sec. Ted.

DOH SEC. HERBOSA: Good afternoon, Daphne, and good afternoon to the press corps at Malacañang and I'm very happy to come out of the sectoral cabinet meeting. I briefed the President on the status of nutrition in the Philippines and the nutrition of our children. We were able to show the long history of efforts of different governments and presidents to try and beat three problems – undernutrition, micronutrient deficiency and the more recently now, even obesity in children.

So, we'll focus on the first two because that was the topic of the cabinet discussion and he had very good marching orders after the discussion. We found that out that most of our government funds were actually more on the latter part of a child's undernutrition. So, mas malaki iyong budget sa DepEd for the school-age feeding program; then there's another amount of budget with the DSWD for the preschool kids; and then the DOH is left with the first one thousand days also with the budget that is smaller than the rest of the budgets.

But we emphasized to the President, the emphasis should be on the first one thousand days which involves a pregnant mother – iyong fetus pa lang ay nasa loob ng sinapupunan that they'll be given micronutrients mainly iron, folic acid and then the tetanus and diphtheria vaccine. And then, kapag naipanganak na iyan, dapat mabigyan ng mandatory initiation of breastfeeding which actually helps the first six months of life. And then when they go into supplemental feeding, continue to be able to feed

good nutritious food up to the first one thousand days. And then, they go to the daycare centers they are fed by DSWD, and also when they go to school, they are fed at the schools, at the public schools by DepEd.

Now, what the President emphasized are: number one, he said, *"I want the National Nutrition Council to take the lead because we have the National Nutrition Council,"* which was established in 1974 and it's a multiagency strategic council composed of the—DOH is now the chair and the vice chair is the Department of Agriculture and the other vice chair is the Department of Interior and Local Government and other agencies are represented. So, he wanted that... we cannot depend on LGUs alone. We need to help the LGUs so he's ordering us to strengthen the National Nutrition Council.

The second thing that came out of the meeting is that suggestion of Secretary Mina Pangandaman of our Department of Budget and Management to actually include this in what we call the convergence budgeting system which has already been implemented for climate change; it's also been implemented for livelihood projects and for gender and development. So, this will be the fourth one for the 2026 budget when we frame it, it will be convergence in nutrition.

Health and nutrition is actually closely linked, so ang President understood this and sabi niya nga, *"When I was governor, I spent 30% of our budget in Ilocos for health and nutrition."* So, he wants the same so I'm actually very happy coming out of this meeting and I have full support of the other cabinet secretaries that were there – Secretary Angara of DepEd, Secretary Solidum of the Department of Science and Technology which has the Food and Nutrition Research Institute of the Philippines, and also Rex Gatchalian, DSWD. DOLE was also there because in workplaces, we also need to give proper nutrition especially for the working age group. Some of the things we discussed is the—and of course, Department of Agriculture. Department of Agriculture was also there because they have to make sure that the food for nutrition will be available.

Some of the things I explained to the President was our "Pinggang Pinoy" and let me just show this program. This is from the NNC, we will give this to the PCO for distribution and we have several for different age groups – the go, grow foods for the different age group – this is for pregnant and lactating mothers. So, they have the diets available for them. This is for the preschool youth, three to five; these are for the school age, 13 to 18; and then of course, even adults, for adults and the different age groups.

DOH SEC. HERBOSA: So, these are the meal plans. We'll have it given to the PCO so that you can be given copies, and we will leave this here for more information.

So, I'm actually very happy because if you're going to invest anything in health, the key is having nutrition corrected. If we're going to fix stunting, our stunting rate is something like 26%, that's like three kids out of ten are stunted/bansot. The problem is not the bansot; the problem is the low cognitive ability, mahina iyong utak because the brain development happens in the first 1,000 days. So, we've been able to explain this to the President. And with this, we hopefully the efforts of government will be more focused on the first 1,000 days.

So, I'll end there, Daphne, maybe we can open the floor.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Thank you, Sec. Ted. Questions? Harley Valbuena, DZME.

HARLEY VALBUENA/DZME: Hi! Good afternoon.

DOH SEC. HERBOSA: Good afternoon.

HARLEY VALBUENA/DZME: Secretary, how far are we on the first 1,000 days program? Gaano na po karaming nanay and mga bata iyong nakinabang dito?

DOH SEC. HERBOSA: Okay, so the first 1,000 days is a law, that's a republic act, that when that law was passed finally, there's emphasis on making sure the antenatal visits. So kailangan niyan may four antenatal visits ang bawat pregnant mother. I don't have the exact figure because this is devolved function. So, we're hoping dapat lahat ng buntis but unfortunately, doon sa statistics ko, nakikita ko karamihan ay two visits lang or even no antenatal visit. It is in the antenatal visits na matuturuan sila ng nutrition, mabibigay iyong micro-nutrients; many of our kids especially from the lower socio-economic classes, sila iyong walang access. So kaakibat nito is not only education [but] making this antenatal care available to the poor and to the communities, doon sa malalayong lugar.

So, this is envisioned by certain LGUs that succeeded. They were telling me the story of Quezon Province. Quezon Province was able to improve the first 1,000 days just by giving incentives to the mother, to the pregnant mother. Even to the tricycle driver na naghahatid sa kanila sa health center, binibigyan ng bigas. So, there are many innovative ideas, and iyon iyong call ng President that hopefully we have more local chief executives that will support. But we ordered the national government agencies na tutukan itong nutrition as a project. So that's a good thing.

CHONA YU/PEOPLE'S JOURNAL: Sir, do you have data kung ilang mga batang Pilipino ang malnourished at obese po?

DOH SEC. HERBOSA: Okay. So, for undernutrition or stunting, our figure is 26% -- 26.7% -- so that's almost three out of ten; for obesity, it's about 30%. But let me explain 'no, the two are in different socio-economic sectors. The obesity problem is in our middle class and our upper-middle class, and obesity might be corrected with the separate approach. That means, these people have enough food, in fact, sobra nga eh. Ang kulang sa kanila ay exercise. So, having an active life, baka ito iyong kids na may iPad na bata pa, may gaming, they lack exercise. So, the approach there will be/my approach for non-communicable diseases or lifestyle diseases which is what they will get at the later age.

So, in numbers, that's about almost three million children that are stunted [who are] under five years old, this is below five. So different ages iyan kaya umabot ng—we give birth to about 1.7 million kids a year eh, so ganoon iyong figures.

CHONA YU/PEOPLE'S JOURNAL: Sir, how about sa undernourished po?

DOH SEC. HERBOSA: Iyon iyon, iyong stunting, stunting or undernutrition. Iyon iyon, three million kids that are probably undernourished, different age groups iyon, hindi lang in one age group.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Perhaps, you'd like to also discuss over-nourishment?

DOH SEC. HERBOSA: Obesity naman, oo, obesity, 30% so parang ganoon din iyon eh, around that figure. But it's a different problem. It's really food choice, mataas ang cholesterol, mataas ang carbs, unli rice, malakas kumain ng kanin, maraming sweets. That was also discussed in the meeting. The President was

asking me and I didn't know why the Filipinos like sweet food. Baka masagot ninyo ako kasi hindi ko siya masagot eh.

But there were some theories, sabi nila, early on ay mahilig na tayo sa soft-drinks so our taste buds like sweet stuff. So, in children, the obesity is 15%; in adolescents, it's about 40%, adults and adolescents. So mataas siya and that creates our hypertension, diabetes. So ibang problem iyon so I'd like to address that through, you know, addressing it at school age kasi kapag naturuan natin sa school age with proper nutrition advice, their choices, their health choices might be better; and then, we will ask them to move, activity, exercise, sports ganoon.

CHONA YU/PEOPLE'S JOURNAL: Sir, nagpa-factor in po ba iyong mga fast-food?

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Yes.

CHONA YU/PEOPLE'S JOURNAL: And then iyong mga parents na medyo hindi nagluluto ng pagkain, iyong mga—?

DOH SEC. HERBOSA: Yes, on analysis, we've found out, apparently, this marketing, these fast-food chains have beautiful marketing. Kahit ako kapag napanood ko iyong marketing nila, ngayong Pasko, maglalabas-labas na naman ng marketing iyan and they kind of create the wrong image. So, we're trying to—I have a health promotion bureau director now who's part of you before, was from media, si Tina Marasigan. She's presented to me solution to fighting this problem of the advertising of the fast-food chain. Also, the fast-foods are ... they add more sugar; they add more salt, so that adds to the problem of hypertension, diabetes, but it also makes it masarap.

The other thing we found is, you know, buying food in the market let's say in the Kadiwa, bringing it home, buying oil, kamatis, sibuyas, bawang, iluluto mo pa takes time. Many of our women now are double income families eh – the husband and the wife are both working. So, sometimes the simpler choice is to call food delivery service for your children. So, very important talaga iyong choices na iyon.

So, iyon ibang approach talaga iyong sa obesity kasi it's a different problem but iyong under nutrition, stunting and micronutrient – iyon iyong tinarget at pinag-usapan namin sa Cabinet meeting.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. Katrina Domingo, ABS-CBN.

KATRINA DOMINGO/ABS-CBN: Hi, sir. Good afternoon. Sir, you mentioned that the President wants most of our government funds to be spent on the first 1,000 days.

DOH SEC. HERBOSA: Hindi naman most.

KATRINA DOMINGO/ABS-CBN: Sir, well there's a shift. So, currently in terms of percentage, how much is being allocated to the latter part of a child's ...?

DOH SEC. HERBOSA: Okay. For the Department of Health, we have something like half a billion for the program – for the micronutrient and the safe motherhood program; DSWD has like five billion for the preschool feeding program; and DepEd has like 12 billion for the school age feeding program. By the way, that's big because by law they are supposed to feed from kindergarten to Grade VI, Grade VII. So, they are supposed to feed everything kaya ang laki; the National Nutrition Council has only 208 million as our

yearly budget. So, that's the council that does the strategy and then now we've also implemented the Tutok Kainan which is a program to actually implement feeding in underage children.

KATRINA DOMINGO/ABS-CBN: Sir, how will these allocations change given the President's recent mandate to put more resources sa prenatal needs ...?

DOH SEC. HERBOSA: So, that's what I mentioned earlier about convergence budgeting plan that Secretary Mina Pangandaman has mentioned which has been applied in climate change kasi when you look at climate change – environment, health, DPWH, lahat are involved. So, we just have a convergence budget that will fight climate change and crisis. Ganoon din sa GAD and then ganoon din sa livelihood. The newest one that they asked for convergence budgeting kasi may livelihood sa iba-ibang agencies – sa DOLE, may livelihood sa DSWD. So, parang iyong vision niya sabi ni Secretary Pangandaman, "Ganiyan na rin ang gawin natin, Mr. President. When we do the 2026 budget we should actually have convergence so we know exactly what we're spending for."

And then there's another program we do which is the foreign assisted project called the Philippine Multisectoral Nutrition Project wherein we're targeting 200-plus areas in the Philippines, the poorest with the highest rate of stunting and we had a funding from the World Bank and part of that project is really the digitalization of reporting so that we have a central repository – parang mayroon kaming command center where [unclear]. It's about 235 municipalities, 40 of which are in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region where the rates of stunting are higher.

KATRINA DOMINGO/ABS-CBN: Sir, one more thing for me. Sir, you mentioned that you will ask children to move, to have more activities, to have more exercise and sports to combat obesity – does this mean that there will be changes in the DepEd curriculum?

DOH SEC. HERBOSA: Yeah. We've discussed this with...I've had a meeting prior naman ito because most of my...I was talking to him about lifestyle diseases so this is not really...well, it's nutrition but this is another angle which is the problem of lack of exercise – obesity. So, sitting just on, watching [unclear] ngayon people are just in a computer so exercise has been lost. So, I was discussing this with Secretary Sonny Angara to make sure that these activities are also stimulated in the curriculum in DepEd.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. Harley.

HARLEY VALBUENA/DZME: Sir, I believed you mentioned earlier na iyong malnutrition is nakakaapekto po sa mortality rate ng infant. So, baka po you have the data on how many children die at least every year due to malnutrition?

DOH SEC. HERBOSA: Correct. So, it's not directly malnutrition but it's indirectly. So, the overall under five [years old] mortality is about 22 per 1,000. The one for under one age is about 18 and the one lower is 15; so, iyong neonatal iyong 15. Unfortunately, malaki iyong proportion noong neonatal deaths natin. Iyong the rest are declining – so, that means the activities we're probably working – iyong immunization, iyong addressing the feeding. Iyong sa first year of life that's breastfeeding. Iyong aming neonatal is like 30 percent of the whole mortality of under-five and that's due to lack of antenatal care – ang feeling ko iyong mother. And I'm addressing probably unplanned pregnancy, so reproductive health products; and number two, childhood pregnancy – I'm looking at that as the source of that problem because maybe the kids that are pregnant children probably don't even want to eat because they don't want to see the bump visible so they'll end up with a—sabi ko nga sa President, small for gestational age – nanganganak

silang term pero iyong bata stunted na, pinanganak pa lang, agrabyado na siya tapos hindi nag-antenatal visit iyon; hindi siya nabigyan ng folic acid – folic acid is needed for the brain; hindi siya nabigyan ng iron so baka anemic iyon. So, these are the things we're trying to correct.

For the childhood pregnancy, my thinking is if I just able to make modern methods of contraception available I can half that, I can half the mortalities due to childhood pregnancies.

HARLEY VALBUENA/DZME: Sir, how about po on the obesity, mayroon din pong mga bata na namamatay due to being obese?

DOH SEC. HERBOSA: No, they die at 25. The 25, 35, they have hypertension. So, later pa iyon, later iyon mapi-feel. So, we have people now, you probably have friends that are 35, 40, having a heart attack or a stroke. That's kakakain ninyo nung mamantika, matataba at maaalat at matatamis. And then our disease burden in the country is kidney disease. Ang pinakamalaking gastos natin ay pa-dialysis, you probably all know friends who are on dialysis, ask them why they are on dialysis, diabetic nephropathy, so, that's the sugar we are actually eating. Kaya naging discussion sa cabinet iyong bakit matamis iyong panlasa ng Pilipino, so that's the question. Spaghetti natin may sugar eh. Tayo lang yata sa buong mundo ang spaghetti na may sugar.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Let's go back to Katrina.

KATRINA DOMINGO/ABS-CBN: Sir, just a clarification, you mentioned if you can make more modern methods of contraception available, you will. What more modern contraceptives are we talking about and will we go to as far as lowering the age of, I mean of people who can have access to contraception?

DOH SEC. HERBOSA: Correct, like for example, Implanon. Implanon is the implantable, instead of taking pills. It's a more convenient one, because you put it there and the woman is protected, making that available to adolescents; it's going to be protective for unplanned pregnancies. I think the problem is the unplanned pregnancy. If it is a planned pregnancy, sigurado ako the nutrition will be taken care of, di ba, magpapa-prenatal iyan, the diet will be monitored. But it's the unplanned pregnancy that gives us the low birth weight na tinatawag, small-for-gestational age or low birth weight, kapapanganak pa lang, mababa na, tapos you end up with taking care of this.

I remember when we open an adolescent clinic in Las Piñas, the DOH hospital or key opinion leader was a 19-year-old girl, she already has three children. She started giving birth at 14. Hindi lang iyon ha, ang 'ha' is this, panganay silang lahat – panganay silang lahat, ibig sabihin noon, iba-iba ang father. Imagine, you are 19, your problem is raising three children, your childhood is stolen, kasi baka hindi na niya natapos iyong high school, hindi pa makakapag-college iyan, so that has a great effect. So to me, those three are probably unplanned pregnancies.

So, very important that we protect our children also, so malaking bagay iyong planned pregnancy para iyong antenatal visits ay nagagawa at nabibigay.

KATRINA DOMINGO/ABS-CBN: Sir, will you push to institutionalize that program on making implants available to adolescents?

DOH SEC. HERBOSA: We already have the Reproductive Health Law. I just have to make it available in clinics and probably for people to ask it. Alam mo kasi nagkakaroon pa tayo ng problem dito, because parang some parents and some sectors want parental consent for minors to get access to this reproductive health products. Huwag na tayong maglokohan, kasi they have sex anyway, so hindi ko naman sila mahinto to have sex, right? So, probably give them protection for safe sex that will not have unplanned. Let's go back to nutrition.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: At the meeting today, the biggest announcement or order of the President was to increase the lead of the National Nutrition Council. Perhaps, you would like to brief the media about the relevance of this?

DOH SEC. HERBOSA: The National Nutrition Council was actually created through a Presidential Decree in 1974. It was actually to fight malnutrition during the time of his father. So, when I was presenting to him this project natuwa siya kasi by the time it was GMA, President Arroyo, she put the Department of Health again back on top of it. So, he's kind of ordering me and we focus on the National Nutrition Council as the strategic body composed of the different agencies. So, it was in 1974 Presidential Decree 491. It was about 50 years ago, so it is a 50-year old council

The other thing we talk about is it seems that the council can institutionalize a multi-sectoral approach to nutrition. So, those are the things na luminaw kanina na hindi pupuwedeng, I was even joking with the President, sir, ilipat na lang natin iyong National Nutrition Council under the Office of the President, tinanggihan ako eh. So, you lead it, so, we continue to strengthen it, but it seems like the other cabinet secretaries now realize the importance of the council and even their presence. Kasi sabi ko nga, kung minsan, undersecretary or assistant secretary lang ang pinadadala. Bumulong si Secretary Sonny sa akin, mag-a-attend na raw siya.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: This is something very, very important to the President. He mentioned that so many times na as we progress, gusto niya na maipakita rin sa mundo na nagiging healthy na ang mga Pilipino dahil the nutrition problem actually impacts our economic progress, it costs our government when our citizens get sick, at the same time, iyong productivity losses ng ating workforce.

Okay, is there anything else you would like to say before we end this press briefing?

DOH SEC. HERBOSA: Well, finally, I would like to say what we already know, its health and nutrition, if you want a healthy nation. It's about nutrition, good nutrition. Sabi nga ng ibang countries, they say food is medicine. So, if all Filipinos are given the right food they will go, grow and glow and become productive members of Bagong Pilipinas. So, that's the idea: A nutrition program that will strengthen our human capital and make them productive and contributors to the Philippine Economy, sa PPAN panalo ang bayan.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: All right. Thank you so much, Secretary Ted. And maraming salamat, Malacañang Press Corps. This concludes our press briefing today.

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