



Bringing PhilHealth services across lakes and mountains

By: Ralph B. Bermido, LHIO Olongapo

If the rabbit cannot go to the mountain, we bring the mountain to the rabbit". This is a cliché that relates to the experience of Local Health Insurance (LHIO) Olongapo as it visits Sitio Lumibao, Buhawen, San Marcelino, Zambales.

On March 21, 2023, LHIO Olongapo led by Chief Social Insurance Officer Leny D. Fajardo, together with Administrative Assistant VI John Ray Barrera and I, went to Sitio Lumibao, Buhawen, San Marcelino, Zambales, brought the state health insurer's services to register Indigenous Peoples (IPs) in the area.

The team started the day with a two-hour drive from Olongapo to Barangay Buhawen, San Marcelino, Zambales. After a twenty-five-minute boat ride across Mapanuepe Lake and a twenty-minute-trek along dusty roads, the group finally reached the foot of the mountain where Sitio Lumibao sat.

Here, PhilHealth registered 67 families with the National Health Insurance Program to provide them with access to needed health benefits and services. As certified by their Tribal Chieftain, the IPs were of the Aeta Tribe of National Cultural Minorities.

Through this endeavor, the members of the tribe were given their PhilHealth Identification Number (PIN), which also grants them and their dependents with access to PhilHealth's primary care services by assigning them to their preferred Konsulta – or Konsultasyong Sulit at Tama – providers.

The PhilHealth Konsulta package covers individual-based health services, including initial



and follow-up primary care consultations, health screening and assessment, selected diagnostic services and medicines as prescribed by health professionals based on their health needs.

Part of this activity was the PhilSys Birth Registration Assistance Project to provide free negative birth certification and free birth certificate to verified late registrant. This activity was led by Ms. Dona Balasabas, Birth Registration Officer of the Philippine Statistics Authority, and made possible in cooperation with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) represented by Ms. Elvira B. Dumaplin and Ms. Nora P. Bagat.

Through the Universal Health Care (UHC), all Filipinos shall be provided with access to quality health services, whenever and wherever they need them without financial hardship. PhilHealth LHIO Olongapo will ensure realization of UHC so that no Filipino will be left behind, especially our Aeta brothers and sisters, as well as the other marginalized sectors in our society. As Saint Francis of Assisi puts it, *"Start by doing what is necessary; then what is possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible."*