

POLICY BRIEF

Assessment of PhilHealth's Marketing Collateral: Drivers and Barriers on the Utilization of Primary Care Benefits

Introduction

In the advertising field, marketing and communication are used mainly to promote brands and products to influence the choice and buying preferences of the public to increase the sales and revenue of the industry concerned. In healthcare, marketing and communication are utilized to promote services and health brands to influence the health-seeking behavior of people for them to operate and access available services and interventions. The ultimate goals are the attainment of better health outcomes and controlled health expenses that significantly impact the overall healthcare system. Effective marketing and communication are critical to countries like the Philippines, running a national health insurance program. At its fingertips, it needs to have effective marketing and communication strategies to provide accurate information on its benefits packages, availing of entitlements, member enrolment

procedures, premium contributions, and educational campaigns.

Creative marketing and communication evolve with the latest technology and digitization to inform, influence, and change people's behavior. Marketing uses tools, such as brands, to create a visual representation of the product in the minds of consumers. PhilHealth also branded its benefit packages, which are the Z Benefits (catastrophic packages), Konsulta package (primary care benefits), and All Case Rates (inpatient care benefits). PhilHealth realizes the importance of health brands as a marketing tool and takes advantage of available platforms to inform, update and educate the stakeholders of its policies, processes, announcements.

PhilHealth claims to have efficient frontline services to manage inquiries, feedback, and 191 suggestions pertinent to the National Health Insurance Program (NHIP). It has a 24/7 hotline number accessible to the public with call center agents to

immediately respond to inquiries, comments, suggestions, and complaints. Alternatively, members and stakeholders can also send emails to PhilHealth. To further extend PhilHealth's service availability, service desks are put up within malls. PhilHealth also deploys proficient registered nurses in Levels 2 and 3 hospitals nationwide to address queries and assist PhilHealth members regarding their benefits and other processes at the point of confinement in a hospital. These PhilHealth front liners are called the PhilHealth CARES (Customer Assistance, Relations, and Empowerment Staff). They proactively provide information updates to patients, conduct exit surveys, and make the member experience at point-of-service truly pleasant.

PhilHealth also utilizes print, radio, and information caravans for its marketing and communication efforts. Recently, it explored advertising using virtual platforms and social media. Print media is through local and regional newspapers, national tabloids, broadsheets, and print ads. PhilHealth also utilizes radio spot buys and block time. Online platforms include live Facebook sessions, posting of social media content, website management, SMS, email, and group apps. It is noteworthy that PhilHealth does not utilize TV as means for communication in marketing.

Recently, PhilHealth included the PhilHealth Member Portal (PMP) website that will allow members of the state insurer fast and convenient ways to access important information about their records online and about PhilHealth in general. PMP also features an online payment gateway to enable PhilHealth members easier transactions regarding premium contributions. This initiative was made possible for ease of doing business and became timely in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. For CY 2021, the focus of PhilHealth's communication plan and strategy will be the intensification of its marketing and communications, especially on improving its brand management, which is focused on primary care benefits.

Republic Act 11223 or the Universal Health Care (UHC) Law Chapter 1, Section 2(b) describes a "health care model that provides all Filipinos access to a comprehensive set of quality and cost-effective, promotive, preventive...health services.." In keeping with the spirit of the UHC Law, PhilHealth developed the package of services for primary care branded as PhilHealth Konsultasyong Sulit at Tama (PhilHealth Konsulta Package).

The Implementing Guidelines for the PhilHealth Konsulta Package (Circular 2020-0022) and the accreditation policy (Circular 2020-

0021) for Konsulta providers are to be rolled out nationwide as these policies are deemed effective upon publication in the official gazette. As the Konsulta Package is going to be implemented, there are immediate challenges that PhilHealth needs to address. Potential primary care providers have to be accredited to provide access to members of PhilHealth. On the other hand, members have to be registered with their choice of primary care providers. A series of orientations among PhilHealth Regional Offices and selected healthcare providers began in the previous year, but the content was limited to the technical aspects of the policy. The PhilHealth Central Office that conducted the orientations during the last year expects that the succeeding information roll-out will be primarily from the initiatives of the regional offices. Without a standard set of messages to be disseminated to stakeholders, members and healthcare providers may not fully understand this Konsulta Package, and misperception could become a significant barrier in its implementation.

There is robust evidence in the literature that primary healthcare is more cost-effective than tertiary care, especially when dealing with catastrophic conditions. The importance of investing in effective marketing and communication strategies for primary healthcare

cannot be overemphasized. Promoting preventive health saves patients, reduces morbidities, influences good health-seeking behavior, and allows efficient use of resources, which translates to cost savings on PhilHealth.

Given the tall order of Universal Health Care, it is vital to assess the effectiveness of PhilHealth's current marketing and communication strategies, which administers the country's NHIP.

The study provides a basis for further research and recommendations to improve marketing and communication campaigns, methods, and tools and develop a marketing and communication plan that will have great relevance for information and strongly influence the work and mission of PhilHealth in marketing and communication effectiveness.

Result

During the recent study, many of the responses mentioned that PhilHealth is often used for hospital confinement. Other responses said that PhilHealth is often used for maternity care and that a hospital billing discount or refund may be availed after confinement. When asked about their knowledge on primary care benefits, most of the participants' responses alluded to having no awareness or hearing about it for the first time, and during

the focus group discussions, a few responses having some awareness of the primary care benefits but would need some clarifications. Only a few responses mentioned availing of the primary care benefits, in particular, for outpatient laboratory and diagnostic procedures. Many of the responses of FGD participants hinted at having the desire to know more about primary care benefits through social media (e.g., Facebook) and messaging platforms such as email or Messenger. Some responses mentioned that information on these benefits might also be disseminated through television (i.e., advertisements, news), flyers or leaflets, seminars, and text messaging. Other responses touched on other desired sources of information, including PhilHealth Office, hospital billing section or clinic, doctors, and human resources department. For members of the 4 P's Program, information about PCB may be coursed through the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), which manages the said program. Barangay officials and family members were also mentioned as potential sources of information in a few responses.

Based on the analysis of the results from the focus groups, the type of communication channels and the type of marketing strategies facilitate primary care benefits to PhilHealth members. However, there could be misinformation for the

communication channels if the message does not come from reliable sources and depends on the level of comprehension of the individual. Further, health literacy issues also come into play that hinders utilization or understanding of primary care benefits by PhilHealth members.

Recommendation

The drivers to effective marketing of the primary care benefits of PhilHealth are the use of appropriate communication channels and marketing strategies that appeal to the current preferences of PhilHealth members. It is recommended to update the marketing strategies based on updates in policies and, most importantly, to improve the marketing and communication strategies that appeal to the interest of PhilHealth members. It also recommended strengthening these identified drivers to market the primary care benefits effectively. PhilHealth management should provide the necessary technical and budgetary support to these.

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Original Research

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