



Volunteer Youth Leaders for Health - Philippines

empowering the youth for health

Institute of Human Genetics, National Institutes of Health
University of the Philippines - Manila
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ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

HISTORY

The **Volunteers Youth Leaders for Health – Philippines (VYLH-Phil)** is a network of leaders from the different youth organizations based in universities and communities throughout the Philippines. This novel undertaking is part of an international effort to establish the **Global Partnership for Perinatal Health (GPPH)** participated by youth counterparts in China, Brazil and Lebanon linked by the common interest of volunteerism and public service, to improve birth outcomes worldwide through **advocacy**.

The **VYLH Philippines** was formally organized last July 17-19, 2009 during the National Youth Camp (**1st National Youth Camp: Institution and Planning Workshop of VYLH Philippines**) in Tagaytay Dacha Hotel, Tagaytay City through the collaborative effort of the **Institute of Human Genetics of the National Institute of Health-University of the Philippines, Manila, Department of Health** and **The UPLB Genetics Society**, a student organization of **University of the Philippines Los Baños**.

The National Youth Camp marked the launch of massive information drive in schools and communities represented by the attendees. The pioneer batch of leaders conducted a series of advocacy and promotional activities in their respective schools and communities. In some schools or universities, the network expanded in other organizations. Majority of community based youth organizations became partners of the rural and city health offices of their respective communities. They were also mobilized in the advocacy and promotional work of the health center.

Inspired by the result of the ground-breaking effort of the pioneering leaders, a series of Island-wide youth camps were conducted last July 2010. The island-wide youth camps aimed to orient a new set of leaders about the VYLH and its health advocacies in order to increase the membership of the VYLH network in other schools/universities and other communities from unrepresented areas from the pioneer group.

The theme for the recently concluded island-wide camps was **“VYLH Philippines – K4: Kabataan Kabalik ng Kalusugan para sa Kinabukasan”**. The theme reiterated the unique role of VYLH as partners of the Department of Health and the Institutes of Human Genetics, NIH in pursuing activities towards the improving quality life of the public. The series of camps were conducted and facilitated primarily by the pioneering leaders of the first VYLH camp. The activity served as a venue wherein pioneering leaders were able to develop further their leadership and facilitating skills. The camps were conducted in collaboration and support of IHG-NIH, Newborn Screening Centers (Visayas and Mindanao), Center for Health Development - DOH Region 7, and National Center for Disease Prevention and Control (NCDPC) – Child Health Division.



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BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Annually, there are approximately 7.8 million children affected with birth defects worldwide. In the Philippines, birth defects are among the top 20 causes of death across the lifespan and represent the eighth leading cause of infant mortality. The causes are unknown and the risk factors and knowledge on preventive measures are not established yet.

Each year, approximately 6-12% of the total 136 million births worldwide are borne preterm. Close to a third or 27% of infant deaths are due to prematurity. At present, there is no reliable data on the rate of prematurity in the country. Instead, existing data only show low birth weight (LBW-less than 2.5 kg birth weight) contributed by prematurity and intrauterine growth restrictions (IUGR), estimated at 13% -20%. Among women with live births, 50% were not given information about the danger signs of pregnancy.

The youth sector, comprising almost one-third of the country's population, is now recognized as one of the key players in the Philippine society. Records show that in 1995, 18 million women around the world were within reproductive ages (15-49). It was projected to increase to 30 million by 2020. Furthermore, statistics show that youth constitutes majority of the women in reproductive age.

Increasing awareness among the youth particularly those in the reproductive age is a crucial strategy towards reduction of deaths and complications from preterm births. Preparing future parents while they are still young will greatly help in the fight against one of the leading causes of infant mortality. Educating people on how to take good care of their bodies and their offspring must start at an early age. It is even more crucial for women that they learn to achieve good health while they are still young. Maintaining good health during their reproductive years can prevent negative effects during pregnancy and the baby's health. For instance, studies revealed that folic acid supplementation during reproductive age prevent neural tube defects.

Mobilizing the youth for health is an endeavor in which the youth will act as a catalyst for change. It is hoped that through this endeavor, members of the organization and beneficiaries of the awareness campaign will engage on a more active role towards advocating health concerns among the youth sector and the public



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OBJECTIVES

THE NATIONAL VYLH GOAL: *To create a network of Volunteer Youth Leaders and Youth Organizations in universities and schools in major cities and communities in the Philippines dedicated to the promotion of awareness on the role of folic acid on the prevention of birth defects specifically neural tube defects.*

Specifically, VYLH aims:

- To conduct research on the current knowledge and perception of the youth about folic acid, preterm births and birth defects through survey forms;
- To develop informational materials that will increase the knowledge and perception of the youth about folic acid, preterm births and birth defects;
- To conduct promotional activities (addressing the issues on preterm births and birth defects) among the youth with main topics based on the results of the research;
- To increase awareness among women in their reproductive age on the significance of folic acid supplementation in the prevention of birth defects;
- To increase public awareness in saving newborns from mental retardation and death through newborn screening;
- To lobby public support for the urgent passage of the Rare Disease Act of the Philippines, an act addressing the needs of patients with rare, orphan disorders; and
- To organize “educated” youth and youth groups to conduct awareness campaigns in the community and in other universities.

PRINCIPLES

Leadership. Commitment. Advocacy. Voluntarism. These are the binding principles of Volunteer Youth Leaders for Health-Philippines which are grounded on the following philosophy:

- VYLH believes that collectively the youth sector can lead in collaboration with other sectors in nation building by working towards a healthy society.
- VYLH believes that in order to play a critical role in nation building, unrelenting commitment to humanitarian endeavor that benefits the public is of utmost importance.
- VYLH believes that the network in collaboration with government and non-government health agencies at all levels shall advocate for the health needs of the youth sector and public towards a healthy future.
- VYLH believes that the spirit of volunteerism should be inculcated in the minds of the youth, making them more responsible and concerned citizens.



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ACTIVITIES

VYLH - Philippines was organized with the aim of mobilizing the youth towards health work. Currently, the network is doing advocacy and promotional work in their respective schools and communities on the following health concerns:



Increasing awareness among women in their reproductive age on the significance of folic acid supplementation in the prevention of birth defects;



Increasing public awareness in saving babies from mental retardation and death through newborn screening; and



Lobbying public support for the urgent passage of the Rare Disease Act - an act addressing the needs of patients with rare, orphan disorders.

CURRENT MEMBERSHIP

Table 1. Membership Profile of VYLH-Philippines as of August 2010.

	PIONEER BATCH (2009)	K4 BATCH (2010)			K4 BATCH TOTAL	NATIONAL TOTAL
		LUZON	VISAYAS	MINDANAO		
Total Number of Participants	73	43	34	39	116	189
University-based	50	39	19	29	87	137
Community-based	23	4	15	10	29	52
Total Number of Organizations	43	20	21	18	59	102
University-based	30	18	10	15	43	73
Community-based	13	2	11	3	16	29
Affiliated Schools, Colleges, Universities	20	15	6	11	32	52
Affiliated Communities	12	2	4	2	8	20

The names of Affiliated Organizations are compiled in Appendix 1.

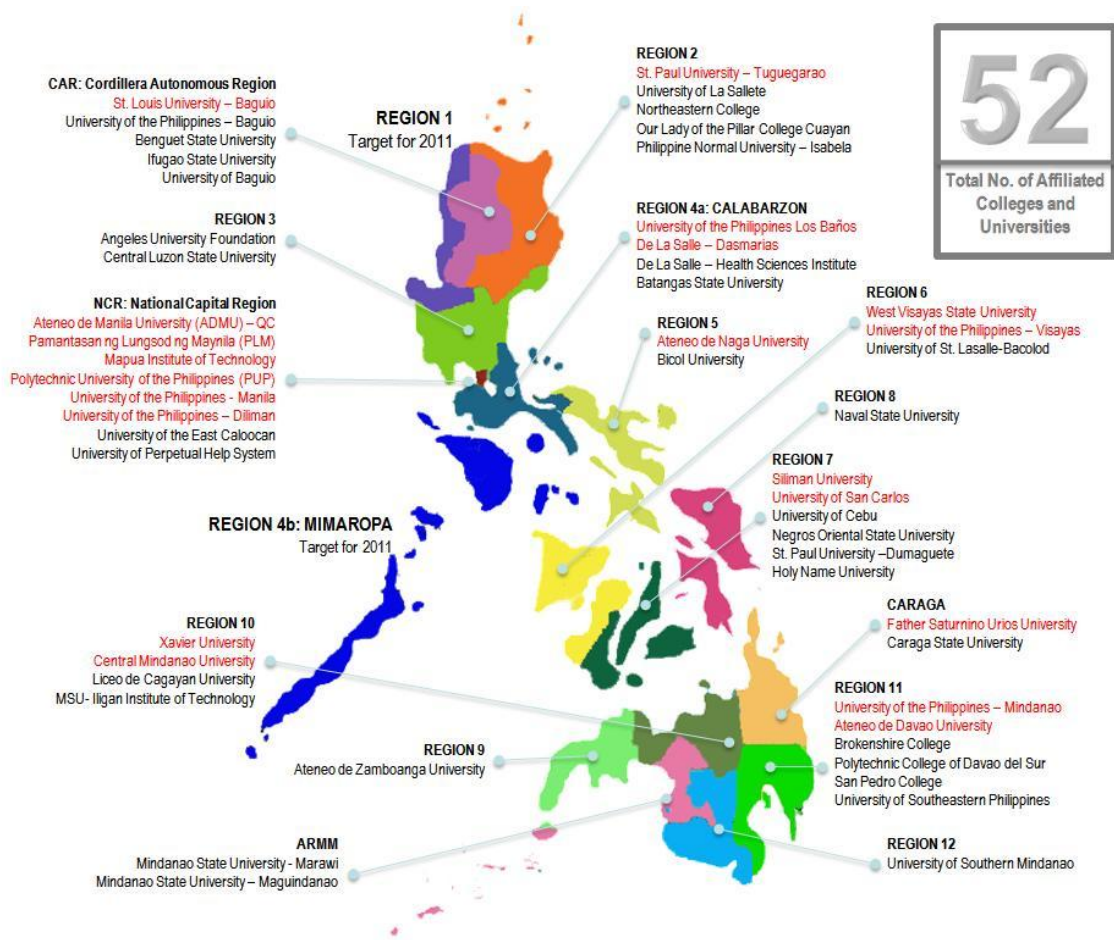


Figure 1. Distribution of VYLH-Philippines Affiliated Schools, Colleges and Universities.

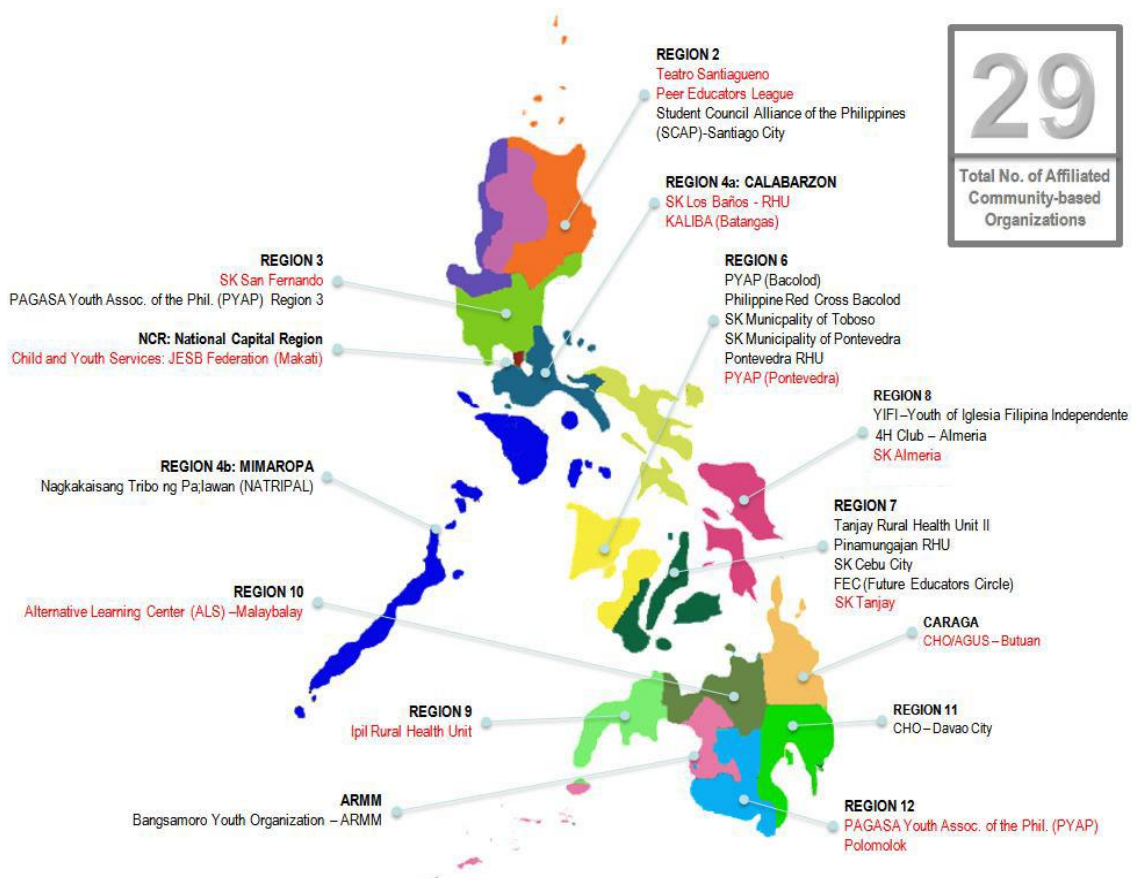


Figure 2. Distribution of VYLH-Philippines Affiliated Community-based Organizations

Legend: Names in Red, Pioneer Organizations (2009); Names in Black, K4 Batch (2010)



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ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

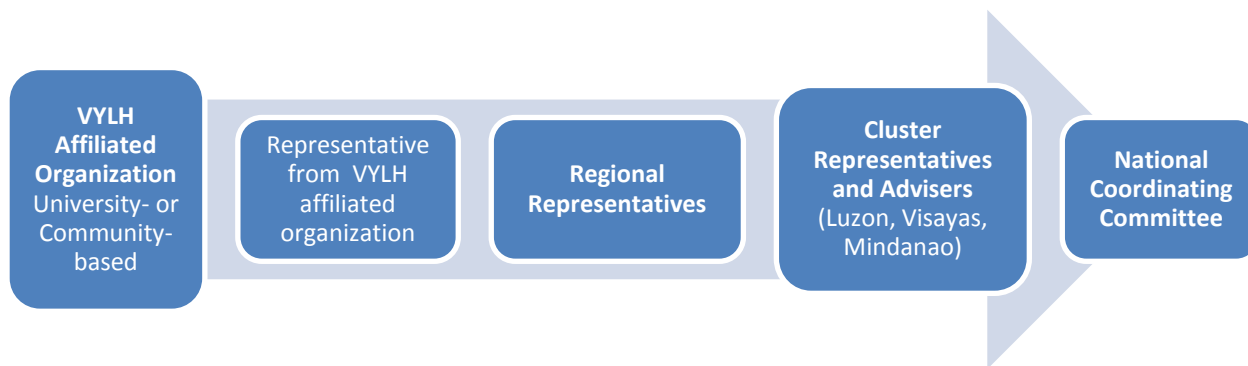


Figure 3. Organizational Structure of VYLH-Philippines.

The current structure of the VYLH is grounded on a networking scheme of youth leaders and their organizations from universities, colleges and communities throughout the Philippines. Affiliated organizations which became part of the network after the island-wide youth camps would enter the network through an official representative. The official representatives of these organizations were grouped into their regions. From the regional groupings, two regional representatives were selected. Regional representatives were then clustered into the island groups of the Philippine archipelago which are also represented by two representatives each. The organizational, regional and cluster representatives are primarily tasked to orient and coordinate members regarding the plans and the current status of their advocacy and networking activities in the areas under their supervision. Each cluster also has an adviser: Luzon, Dr. Eva-Cutiongco de la Paz (Director of the Institute of Human Genetics); Visayas, Dr. Barbara Cavan (Pediatrician/Clinical Geneticist – Cebu) and Dr. Edgar Winston Posecion (Unit Head, NSC-Visayas); and Mindanao, Dr. Conchita Abarquez (Unit Head, NSC-Mindanao).

The center of the communication within the network and facilitation of advocacy campaigns nationwide is the National Coordinating Committee. The NCC is composed of the VYLH secretariats, the cluster representatives and their advisers. The national VYLH program is under the supervision of Dr. Carmencita Padilla (NCR Cluster Adviser; Chair, Dept. of Pediatrics, UP-PGH; former Director, IHG-NIH). VYLH-Phil. was instituted under the supervision of Dr. Padilla and Dr. Merlyn Medioro, the UPLB Program Coordinator (Senior Adviser of The UPLB Genetics Society – VYLH Phil. pioneer student organization).



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PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS



Department of Health
Republic of the Philippines



Institute of Human Genetics
National Institutes of Health – UP Manila



Philippine Society for Orphan Disorders, Inc.



Genetics and Molecular Biology Division
Institute of Biological Sciences, UP Los Baños

Newborn Screening Centers (NSC)



Newborn Screening and Reference Center
NIH UP Manila



NSC Visayas
Western Visayas Medical Center
La Paz, Iloilo City



NSC Mindanao
Southern Philippines Medical Center
Davao City

CONTACT INFORMATION

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