

BUCAS centers—enhancing access to urgent and ambulatory care in underserved areas across the country

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In early 2024, under its Modernization for Health Equity framework and in line with the Universal Health Care Law—ensuring every Filipino immediate access to preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative, and palliative care¹—the Department of Health launched the “28 for 28 by 28” initiative to establish 28 Bagong Urgent Care and Ambulatory Service (BUCAS) centers, aiming to

serve 28 million of the poorest Filipinos by 2028.² The BUCAS Program also aligns with the DOH's 8-Point Action Agenda, specifically addressing “Bawat Pilipino ramdam ang kalusugan” and “Ligtas, dekalidad at mapagkalingang serbisyo.”³ BUCAS centers were created to bridge critical gaps in the Philippine health care system, delivering urgent medical, surgical, and dental care to underserved populations. These centers serve as primary care hubs, decongesting hospitals by offering preventive, diagnostic, and curative services, and guiding patients to higher-level facilities when needed.

The first BUCAS center was launched in Santo Tomas, Pampanga, on March 6, 2024.⁴ By December 16, 2024, a total of 41 BUCAS centers are in operation, with 40 registered in the National Health Facility Registry.⁵ The remaining center, the SPMC-City Government of Davao Marilog District Hospital BUCAS Center, is managed by the Southern Philippines Medical Center in partnership with the City Government of Davao Marilog District Hospital and duly supported by the Department of Health Davao Center for Health Development and the Davao City Health Office (see infographic). More BUCAS centers are being developed with increased funding support from Congress.⁶ While some BUCAS centers are located within or near DOH hospitals as an extension of their services, many operate at a considerable distance from DOH hospitals or other health facilities.

The BUCAS centers work with DOH hospitals, local government units (LGUs), state universities, and regional Centers for Health Development.⁷⁻¹¹ They rely on shared infrastructure and human resources. Funding sources include PhilHealth reimbursements, the

Medical Assistance to Indigent and Financially Incapacitated Patients (MAIFIP) program, Malasakit Centers, other insurers, and quantified free services provided by DOH hospitals.

BUCAS centers are designed to offer accessible, urgent care, giving walk-in patients a less crowded alternative to tertiary hospitals. Services provided include support for emergency rooms through treatment of non-life-threatening cases, outpatient consultations, x-rays, laboratory tests, minor surgeries, dental/oral health services, and continuity of care through follow-up check-ups and referrals. Collaborations with DOH hospitals and LGUs further enhance health care accessibility. A well-rounded health care team is essential to deliver effective urgent and ambulatory services, encompassing General Surgery, Obstetrics and Gynecology, Anesthesiology, Radiology, Internal Medicine, Pediatrics, Family Medicine, Emergency Medicine, and Dental Medicine services, to name a few. BUCAS centers also provide an ideal environment for resident physicians to develop their competencies through hands-on experience with first-contact and continuing health care.

Yet, challenges remain. Currently, BUCAS centers are primarily located in accessible areas, leaving gaps in the original objective of reaching the poorest Filipinos in disadvantaged areas. A robust referral and back-referral system with tertiary hospitals is also needed to ensure continuity of care as BUCAS centers expand, preventing fragmentation and improving outcomes. Sustainability is also a significant concern, as these centers often depend on temporary staff and face funding uncertainties. As facility infrastructure improves, it becomes crucial to develop strategies for attracting and retaining skilled health care professionals. Without adequate staffing, even well-equipped facilities cannot provide timely, quality care.

Expanding PhilHealth coverage for primary health care would enhance access to diagnostics and treatment, particularly for underserved populations. It should also include preventive health

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Received

14 October 2024

Accepted

20 December 2024

Published online

20 December 2024

Cite as

Concha AS. BUCAS centers—enhancing access to urgent and ambulatory care in underserved areas across the country. *SPMC J Health Care Serv*. 2024;10(2):5. <https://n2t.net/ark:/76951/jhcs3xy76>.

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Region I

1. Mariano Marcos Memorial Hospital and Medical Center - Banna BUCAS Center
2. Ilocos Training and Regional Medical Center/Bagong Urgent Care And Ambulatory Services (BUCAS) Center
3. BUCAS Center - Tubao, La Union

Region II

4. Amulung BUCAS Center
5. Mallig BUCAS Center

Cordillera Administrative Region

6. Luis Hora Memorial Regional Hospital - Natonin BUCAS Center
7. Conner District Hospital Calaoan BUCAS Center
8. Conner District Hospital Mataguisi BUCAS Center
9. Far North Luzon General Hospital And Training Center Kasaranay BUCAS Center
10. Far North Luzon General Hospital And Training Center Tanglagan BUCAS Center

Region III

11. Jose B. Lingad Memorial General Hospital BUCAS Facility
12. Dr. Jose N. Rodriguez Memorial Hospital BUCAS Center
13. Dr. Paulino J. Garcia Memorial Research And Medical Center - Talavera General Hospital BUCAS Center

National Capital Region

14. Amang Rodriguez Memorial Medical Center Agarang Gamutan at Atensyon para sa Pamayanan Center
15. East Avenue Medical Center Urgent and Ambulatory Care
16. Philippine Heart Center (BUCAS) Center
17. Quirino Memorial Medical Center BUCAS Center

Region IV-A

18. Batangas Medical Center - Batangas State University BUCAS Center

Region VI

19. Knowtell Mall-Based And Mobile Clinic
20. Western Visayas Medical Center BUCAS Center

Region VII

21. Sugbucas Center - Bantayan District Hospital District Hospital
22. Sugbucas Center - Cebu Provincial City Carcar City
23. Tagbilaran - Governor Celestino Gallares Memorial Medical Center BUCAS Center
24. Trinidad - Governor Celestino Gallares Memorial Medical Center BUCAS Center

Region VIII

25. Eastern Visayas Medical Center Villaba BUCAS Center
26. Tolosa Polyclinic BUCAS Center

Region IX

27. Dr. Jose Rizal Memorial Hospital BUCAS Center
28. Margosatubig Regional Hospital BUCAS (Center)
29. Mindanao Central Sanitarium BUCAS Center
30. Zamboanga City Medical Center - Western Mindanao State University BUCAS Center

Region X

31. Northeastern Misamis General Hospital BUCAS Center
32. Northern Mindanao Medical Center BUCAS Center
33. Mayor Hilarion A. Ramiro Sr. Medical Center - Plaridel Community Hospital BUCAS Center

Region XI

34. Davao Regional Medical Center BUCAS Center
35. Davao Occidental General Hospital BUCAS Center
36. Southern Philippines Medical Center - City Government of Davao Marilog District Hospital BUCAS Center

Region XII

37. SOCCSKSARGEN General Hospital BUCAS Center

Region XIII

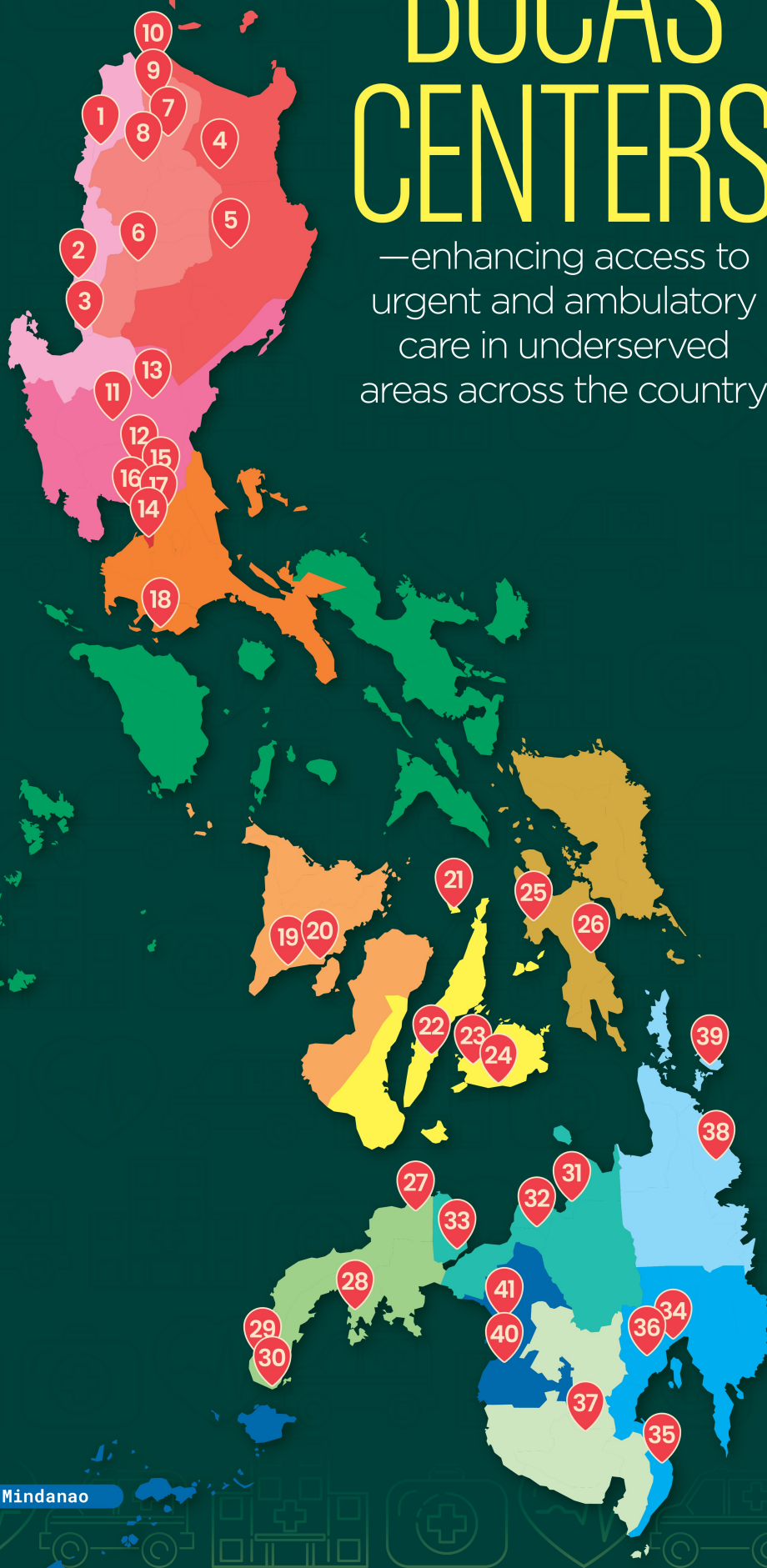
38. Adela Serra Ty Memorial Medical Center BUCAS Center
39. Siargao Island Medical Center BUCAS Center

Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao

40. Cotabato Regional Medical Center BUCAS Center
41. Cotabato Sanitarium and General Hospital BUCAS Center

BUCAS CENTERS

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care costs to support regular care and early intervention. Preventive and educational programs will promote healthier practices and reduce urgent care demands. Proactive health care service adjustments based on community health data and feedback will enable BUCAS to address evolving needs effectively. Research on patient trends, cost-effectiveness, and the overall impact on health care delivery will help refine the BUCAS model. Data on patient load and the impact on host hospitals will be invaluable for evaluating efficiency and scalability. Regular forums for sharing best practices can enhance collaboration

and improve service delivery across BUCAS centers.

Maintaining quality standards in the operation of these centers through licensing is also crucial to ensure that all facilities meet established health care benchmarks. Ensuring that geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas benefit from BUCAS services should also remain a priority. Long-term financing, sufficient staffing, and equipping these centers without overburdening host hospitals are critical for sustainability. Empowering local governments to manage these centers could improve their future stability.

The development of BUCAS centers marks a significant step towards accessible and efficient health care. Their strategic locations and range of services have the potential to relieve hospital emergency rooms. However, ongoing improvements—such as developing sustainable funding and staffing strategies, and adapting services based on community health data and research to meet evolving needs—are needed to enhance patient experience. The success of BUCAS centers ultimately depends on their ability to deliver affordable, accessible, high-quality, and responsive care to all Filipinos.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Maria Elinore Concha of the Professional Education, Training, and Development Office in Southern Philippines Medical Center, and Dr Cindy Baruiz of the Davao Regional Medical Center, for their invaluable insights on the establishment and operation of BUCAS Centers, as well as their constructive feedback on earlier drafts of this article. I also extend special thanks to Mr Mark Mhalon Manalo of Center for Health Development XI for providing essential documents, reading materials, and issuances that contributed to the development of this work.

Article source

Submitted

Peer review

Internal

Competing interests

None declared

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Southern Philippines Medical Center Journal of Health Care Services Editors

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