

Headline	DoH supports mHealth tool Learns leprosy teleconsultation system
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## DoH supports mHealth tool Learns leprosy teleconsultation system

THE Philippines eliminated leprosy at the national level in 1998, seven years after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared its vision of a world free of leprosy. However, pockets of leprosy cases still exist in some regions, particularly in Ilocos Sur and Southern Mindanao.

To address this challenge, the Department of Health (DoH) is implementing the National Leprosy Control Program (NLCP) in partnership with other government agencies, local government units (LGUs), civil society groups and the private sector, which aims to achieve a leprosy-free Philippines by the year 2022.



Present in the ribbon-cutting ceremony during the celebration of World Leprosy Day 2019 (from left) Department of Health National Leprosy Control Program Manager Julie Mart Rubite; Novartis Healthcare PH Corporate Affairs Head Christine Fajardo; Rizal Medical Center Chief Relito Saquilayan; Rizal Medical Center Chief Training Officer Maria Rica Lumague; Rizal Medical Center Infectious Dermatology and Leprosy Unit Head Abelaine Venida-Tablizo; DoH Senior Health Program Officer Pacita Alano; and Rizal Medical Center Department of Dermatology Chairman Francisco Rivera 4th.

In 2013, Novartis Healthcare Philippines and the DoH in partnership with the Novartis Foundation organized the “Best Practices and Innovative Ideas in the Fight against Leprosy Contest.”

“Mobile Tele dermatology E-Referral System for Active Case Finding of New Leprosy Case,” by local tech company MetaHelix, was adjudged best entry in the Innovative Ideas category. Building on this

innovative teledermatology approach, Metahelix, with support from the DoH-Novartis Task Force and Philippine Council for Health Research and Development, developed the Leprosy Alert and Response Network System (Learns), the country's first mobile phone-based leprosy teleconsultation system.

Learns is a mobile health (mHealth) tool that enables health care practitioners in remote areas to refer suspected leprosy patients to experts by sending a picture of the skin lesion and patient details through their mobile phone. Using the Learns system, government health workers (physicians, nurses, midwives and barangay health workers) can send teleconsultations via either SMS or the Learns application. After its successful pilot in Iloilo province in 2014, Learns is now being implemented in 29 provinces in nine regions, with over 6,000 healthcare providers already trained in the system.