NUTRITION INTERNATIONAL

Nourish Life

Philippines programs



NutritionIntl.org



Nutrition International in Philippines

The Philippines continues to face a significant burden of malnutrition despite sustained efforts to improve nutrition and health outcomes. The country is experiencing a triple burden of malnutrition, characterized by persistent undernutrition, widespread micronutrient deficiencies, and a growing prevalence of overweight and obesity. Without accelerated and sustained action, malnutrition is projected to cost the Philippine economy nearly USD $8.5 billion annually, equivalent to approximately 2% of the country's gross national income.[1]

Across the country, anaemia remains a public health concern, affecting 21.8% of pregnant women.[2] Undernutrition also persists, with 25.3% of children under five affected by stunting and 5.1% experiencing wasting,[3] while 13.9% are affected by vitamin A deficiency.[4] Iodine deficiency also remains a concern among both school-aged children (11.6%) and lactating women (20.1%),[4] reflecting continued gaps in salt iodization, with only 34.9% of households consuming adequately iodized salt.[5] In addition, two in 10 women of reproductive age are folate insufficient, increasing the risk of neural tube defect-affected pregnancies.[6]



Nutrition International works in close partnership with the Department of Health, the National Nutrition Council (NNC) and other development partners to strengthen national nutrition policies and programs, and to improve access to high-impact nutrition interventions. Through these efforts, Nutrition International supports the Government of the Philippines to improve nutrition, health, survival and overall wellbeing, particularly among women of reproductive age, adolescents and children.



Priority programs and geographic coverage

Nutrition International works to improve the nutrition, health, survival and wellbeing of the population, especially women, children and adolescent girls by:

- Reducing stunting by strengthening nutrition services for women and children.
- Improving the delivery of health and nutrition services in underserved and marginalized communities, with a particular focus on high-impact interventions during the first 1,000 days, including antenatal care, supplementation, nutrition education and the promotion of exclusive breastfeeding.
- Strengthening nutrition governance and increasing investments in nutrition at national and subnational levels.
- Addressing micronutrient deficiencies through evidence-based approaches, global best practices and innovative solutions.
- Strengthening government policies and programs to improve the quality, equity and sustainability of health and nutrition services.

Programs supported by Nutrition International

As a key ally and partner, Nutrition International supports the Government of the Philippines to deliver a range of programs, including:

- **Wheat flour fortification**
- **Nutrition governance**
- **Salt iodization**
- **Maternal and newborn health and nutrition**
- **Rice fortification**
- **Adolescent and women's health and nutrition**



Addressing stunting in the Philippines

Stunting remains one of the Philippines most significant nutrition challenges, with one in four children under five affected. Improving maternal nutrition, strengthening health systems and addressing the underlying causes of malnutrition during the first 1,000 days — from conception to a child's second birthday — are critical to reducing stunting and improving child growth and development.

Nutrition International, with support from the Government of Canada and in partnership with the Government of the Philippines, is implementing the five-year *Addressing Stunting in the Philippines* project. Aligned with the Philippine Plan of Action for Nutrition (PPAN) 2023–2028 and the Department of Health's 8-Point Action Agenda, the project is being implemented in Pangasinan and Mountain Province to strengthen nutrition services and governance through gender-responsive, multisector approaches.

The project supports the delivery of quality nutrition services by strengthening frontline health worker capacity, integrating multiple micronutrient supplementation (MMS) into antenatal care (ANC) services, and increasing community awareness and demand for essential nutrition interventions. It also strengthens nutrition governance by enhancing the capacity of local government units to plan, coordinate and deliver multisector nutrition programs. Through these efforts, the project aims to improve the nutritional wellbeing of pregnant women and young children by strengthening local systems, improving service delivery and advancing evidence-based nutrition interventions.

The project will directly benefit an estimated 140,800 people, including local government officials, municipal nutrition committee members and health service providers trained in nutrition planning and service delivery, as well as community members — particularly pregnant women and children under five — who will benefit from improved nutrition services. An estimated 400,000 family members living in the households of key beneficiaries will indirectly benefit from the project.

Large-scale food fortification

Food fortification is one of the most cost-effective strategies for addressing micronutrient deficiencies at scale. In the Philippines, Nutrition International works closely with the NNC, the Government of the Philippines and various development partners to strengthen national food fortification policies and regulatory systems, improving access to essential micronutrients through fortified staple foods, including wheat flour and salt. Since 2023, with support from QuantEdge Advancement Initiative, Nutrition International has been implementing the *Bridging the Fortification Gap in the Philippines* project to strengthen policies on wheat flour fortification and salt iodization.

Wheat flour fortification

Nutrition International is supporting the revision of the national wheat flour fortification to align with World Health Organization recommendations, including the addition of folic acid and bioavailable iron as fortificants. These changes are expected to help prevent neural tube defects and iron deficiency anaemia. Once the standard is revised, Nutrition International will support stronger regulatory monitoring and build the technical capacity of government officials and flour millers to implement the updated standard.

Salt iodization

To improve salt iodization monitoring at the national and sub-national levels, Nutrition International conducted a landscape analysis of the national salt iodization program. Findings were shared through events and meetings with government stakeholders and development partners. The recommendations from the analysis have been used to inform the National Salt Iodization Program Strategic Plan 2025–2028, development of policy briefs and action-planning workshops in three provinces. As a result, local government units have advanced policies, action plans and governance mechanisms to strengthen monitoring of national salt iodization program.

Rice fortification:

Nutrition International has also been a longstanding partner in strengthening rice fortification in the Philippines. From 2016–2022, Nutrition International supported efforts to strengthen national policy, improve cross-sector coordination and advance the implementation of mandatory rice fortification across government social safety net programs.





KEY ACHIEVEMENTS:

- The NNC Governing Board approved the resolution supporting the revision of the national wheat flour fortification standards to include folic acid and a more bioavailable iron compound, in line with WHO standards. This development paves the way for next steps in the legal process to revise the standards.
- Significant progress was made in strengthening salt iodization standards across three provinces. Antique developed a draft provincial ordinance and implementing rules under the ASIN Law; La Union finalized a revised action plan and committed to integrating it into local nutrition plans; and Davao completed a costed action plan covering training, monitoring and market assessments.



Maternal and newborn health and nutrition

In 2017, Nutrition International supported the Government of the Philippines to strengthen nutrition services for pregnant women and newborns during the first 1,000 days. This included establishing community-based peer support groups, promoting supplementary feeding programs for nutritionally at-risk pregnant women, increasing uptake of iron and folic acid supplementation, and strengthening the capacity of frontline health workers through training, job aids and operational tools. Nutrition International also strengthened the capacity of local government units (LGUs) to plan, implement and manage nutrition-specific services.

Nutrition International also supported the government to implement interventions to improve the nutrition and health of infants and young children. This included establishing community-based mother-to-mother support groups to provide a continuum of nutrition services for women and their children, promoting exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of life, improving complementary feeding practices for infants aged 6–23 months and increasing the uptake of multiple micronutrient powder supplements.



Adolescent and women's health and nutrition

Adolescence is a critical period for establishing healthy nutrition behaviours that support lifelong health and wellbeing. To improve access to quality nutrition information and promote healthy dietary practices among adolescent girls, Nutrition International partnered with the World Association of Girl Guides and the Girl Scouts of the Philippines to pilot the Girl Powered Nutrition Program.

The program equipped girls with the knowledge, skills and confidence to make healthy food choices and become nutrition advocates within their communities through a curriculum integrated into existing Girl Scout activities, including troop meetings, camps and special events. More than 100,000 Girl Scouts between ages six and 17 participated nationwide. Upon completing the program, participants received the Girl Scouts of the Philippines Nutrition Badge and were empowered to extend nutrition education and outreach to an estimated 200,000 additional girls in their communities.



Nutrition governance

Strong nutrition governance is essential to ensuring that nutrition programmes are effectively planned, financed and implemented across all levels of government. Nutrition International works closely with the NNC and the Department of Health to strengthen nutrition governance, support implementation of the PPAN, and increase investment in nutrition at national and subnational levels.

Support has focused on strengthening local nutrition planning and budgeting, integrating nutrition into local government plans, and improving governance and accountability systems. These efforts contributed to standardized nutrition planning processes across all regional offices and helped increase investments for nutrition at the local government level.

Building on these efforts, Nutrition International continues to strengthen subnational ownership of the PPAN by supporting local governments to optimize nutrition investments, strengthen financing and apply economic evidence to nutrition advocacy and decision making. This work is helping local government units prioritize high-impact nutrition interventions and mobilize sustainable resources to improve nutrition outcomes.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- Supported the NNC to strengthen nutrition planning and accountability at regional and LGU levels through the development of Regional Plans of Action for Nutrition (RPAN) and Local Nutrition Action Plans (LNAPs).
- Successfully advocated for inclusion of gender equality considerations, into the development and operationalization of the PPAN.
- Supported the NNC and provincial government to develop an advocacy strategy and plan to increase local government financing for more effective interventions to reduce stunting among children under five years old in one province and three LGUs.

Contact

Nutrition International Philippines
The Enterprise Centre, Tower 2, 27th Floor, Unit 2701
6766 Ayala Avenue corner Paseo de Roxas
Makati City, Philippines 1226

T: +63 9328454242 **E**: maverilla@NutritionIntl.org

References

1 Nutrition International. (2023). *The Cost of Inaction Tool*. https://www.nutritionintl.org/learning-resource/cost-inaction-tool/

2 Department of Science and Technology – Food and Nutrition Research Institute. (2024). *National Nutrition Summit: Halfway point to 2030 — Key findings of the 2023 National Nutrition Survey* [Presentation slides]. https://enutrition.fnri.dost.gov.ph/uploads/2024%20National%20Nutrition%20Summit_Part%201.pdf

3 Platon-Desnacido, J. (2026). *Anthropometric survey: Key results from the 2025 Updating Survey* [Presentation slides]. Department of Science and Technology – Food and Nutrition Research Institute. https://enutrition.fnri.dost.gov.ph/uploads/2025%20Updating%20Survey%20-%20Anthropometry.pdf

4 Department of Science and Technology – Food and Nutrition Research Institute. (2025). *2023 National Nutrition Survey: Part 2 dissemination results* [Presentation slides]. https://enutrition.fnri.dost.gov.ph/uploads/2024%20National%20Nutrition%20Summit_Part%202.pdf

5 Department of Science and Technology – Food and Nutrition Research Institute. (2024). *2023 National Nutrition Survey: Overview*. https://enutrition.fnri.dost.gov.ph/images/nns-2023/1.%202023%20NNS%20-%20Overview.pdf

6 Bernado, A. K. M., Gordoncillo, N. P., Atienza, L. M., Talavera, M. T. M., & Recuenco, M. C. (2020). Prevalence and factors associated with folate deficiency among Filipino women of child-bearing age. *Malaysian Journal of Nutrition, 26*(2), 229–243. https://doi.org/10.31246/mjn-2019–0075



Nourish Life