

PRESS RELEASE

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ULAP President urges DOH to curb liver cancer deaths

MANILA, Philippines – The Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines (ULAP) today called on the Department of Health (DOH) to arrest the rising mortality of liver cancer and integrate innovative medicines and value-based care into their Universal Health Care (UHC) implementation.

ULAP President and Quirino Governor Dax Cua called for a paradigm shift in how the health department evaluates interventions for public funding and urged Secretary Ted Herbosa to consider the broader impact of losing lives and livelihoods due to the disease. “The data presents a challenge we cannot ignore: Liver cancer continues to kill our constituents at a staggering rate. As the primary implementers of UHC, DOH is in the best position to intervene and address the challenge,” he said.

The month of January is designated as Liver Cancer & Viral Hepatitis Awareness & Prevention Month in many countries including the Philippines, to promote education on risk factors, encourage early detection through screenings, and advocate for healthy liver habits like diet and exercise, aiming to reduce liver disease impact.

Also called the silent killer, liver cancer has the 4th highest incidence in the Philippines with 12,544 new cases (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2023) and ranks 3rd in terms of cancer death, claiming 11,653 lives in a single year (Global Cancer Observatory, 2022).

“The data reveals a stark reality: unlike other cancers where survival rates are improving, the number of deaths from liver cancer is nearly equal to the number of new cases, highlighting a critical gap in early detection and access to effective treatment,” Cua added.

“Parehong buhay at hanapbuhay ang napepeligro,” Cua said. “Liver cancer hits Filipinos hard, often at the peak of their productive lives. When we look at the numbers, we don’t just see patients; we see families pushed into poverty and local economies losing vital workforce.”

Cua emphasized that solving the liver cancer crisis requires innovative medicines such as immunotherapy and targeted treatment. “Currently, no systemic treatment for liver cancer is included in the Philippine National Formulary (PNF),” he stressed.

“Access to modern liver cancer treatments saves local economies. By keeping breadwinners in the workforce, we protect the livelihoods that sustain our communities. By easing the

burden on families who care for the sick, we allow them to remain productive. And by ensuring even the most vulnerable have access to innovation, we close the gap on health disparities. This is not just healthcare—it is the foundation of a resilient society.”

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ULAP is the umbrella organization of all leagues of local government units and local government officials in country, serving as the focal representative and mouthpiece of the subnational government in all policy and program platforms to amplify our unified advocacy towards the strengthening of LGUs into able partners in nation-building.

Learn more at www.ulap.net.ph.