



**G-Watch**  
Citizen Action for Accountability



Making the Elections an  
Accountability Platform

# FactCheck 2022

## Presidential Candidates

### Public Health

**Public Health** refers to “the art and science of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organized efforts of society.”[1] According to the World Health Organization (WHO), public health does not cover mere disease eradication, but also encompasses the whole gamut of services and activities that promote the well-being of people to prevent the deterioration of their health.

As to the Philippines’ public health status, the Department of Health (DOH), in its National Objectives for Health 2017-2022, provides for a summary of health outcomes in the Philippines. As of 2020, data show increasing average life expectancy, slow decline in maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births), slow decline in infant and under-five mortality rates (per 1,000 live births), but a high level of stunting over the years among children under five years, especially among those in rural areas.[2] Filipinos, despite living longer, still bear a “triple burden of disease” because of the high prevalence of communicable and non-communicable diseases, and risks brought by the impacts of globalization and climate change.[3] Health outcomes are at best mixed, with the accessibility and affordability of quality healthcare impeding healthcare utilization.[4] Conflicting and overlapping mandates of the DOH contribute to a “disjointed health system,” and despite supposed increased health resources, more than half of health expenditures are still funded by out-of-pocket (OOP) payments by Filipinos. [5]

# Track Record

As will be seen below, sitting government officials running for president had the most opportunity to implement or develop programs and policies on public health, especially when the COVID-19 pandemic hit.



**Mayor Isko Moreno Domagoso**, in his term as city mayor, oversaw the construction of field hospitals (one quickly constructed in 52 days) and the acquisition of vaccines and medicines given to the public for free. He stocked up on COVID-19 medicines which were made available for patients, and rolled out vaccines in publicly accessible areas.[6] The improvement of the Bagong Ospital ng Maynila and the Manila Infectious Disease Control Center in Sta. Ana is cited as one of his significant accomplishments as mayor.[7]

As Senator, **Panfilo Lacson** is one of the authors of the Bayanihan to Heal As One Act (RA 11469), the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2014 (the RH Law or RA 10354), the Sin Tax Reform Law (RA 10351), and the Philippine Dental Health Act of 2007 (RA 9484). In 2020, he filed a bill, SB 1543 or the Virology Institute of the Philippines Act, to establish an institute to research viruses in light of the pandemic.[8] Lacson, consistent with his anti-corruption stance, has also called for an inquiry in aid of legislation on the “alleged rampant corruption, incompetence, and inefficiency” of the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth), which was adopted by the Senate.[9] He has also consistently called (since 2019) to increase the funding of the Universal Health Care (UHC) Act.[10]



**Senator Manny Pacquiao's** track record on public health include being one of the principal authors of the Expanded Maternity Leave Act (RA 11210), one of the authors of the Bayanihan to Heal As One Act (RA 11469), along with Lacson), and one of the co-authors of the Universal Health Care Act (RA 11223), National Integrated Cancer Control Act (RA 11215), and the Philippine HIV and AIDS Policy Act (RA 11166).[11] He also played an active role in the inclusion of the increase in tobacco tax in the Tax Reform Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) Law in 2017.[12] The same year, he filed a bill which suggested a unitary tax instead of a two-tiered tax, with a 9% annual increase in excise tax (which raises more revenue), to reduce smoking prevalence to 19.8% in 2020.[13] However, in 2021, he backed the Vaporized Nicotine Products Regulation Act, which increased the age of access to e-cigarettes and vapor products from 18 to 21 years old, allowed more access to harmful e-cigarette and vapor product flavors, and transferred regulation of these products from the Food and Drug Administration to the Department of Trade Industry.[14] Earlier, as a Congressman in 2013, he filed bills aiming for the establishment of breast care centers in every region (HB 61) and another to establish the Sarangani Provincial Hospital (HB 60), with a minimum of 100 bed capacity.[15]



**Leni Robredo**, when she was in Congress, was one of the authors of the of the Graphic Health Warnings Law, enacted in 2014. The law prescribed the printing of graphic health warnings on tobacco products. In the House of Representatives, she was the principal author of a bill regulating the availability of sweet beverages to children in schools (HB 4021 or the Health Beverage Options Act of 2014), and a bill that sought to address the mental health of Filipinos (HB 05347 or the Philippine Mental Health Act of 2015). She also authored and filed in 2015 a bill to raise breast cancer awareness (HB 5829 or the Breast Cancer Awareness Month Act) and a bill creating a system of food distribution including procurement to address people's nutritional needs (HB 6062 or the National Food Security Act of 2015).[16]

There is no public record or data available on the public health track record of the following: **Ernesto Abella, Norberto Gonzales, Leody de Guzman, Faisal Mangondato, Ferdinand Marcos, Jr., and Jose Montemayor, Jr.** (Montemayor is a doctor but his significant accomplishments are limited to the private health sector[17]).

# Platform & Plans

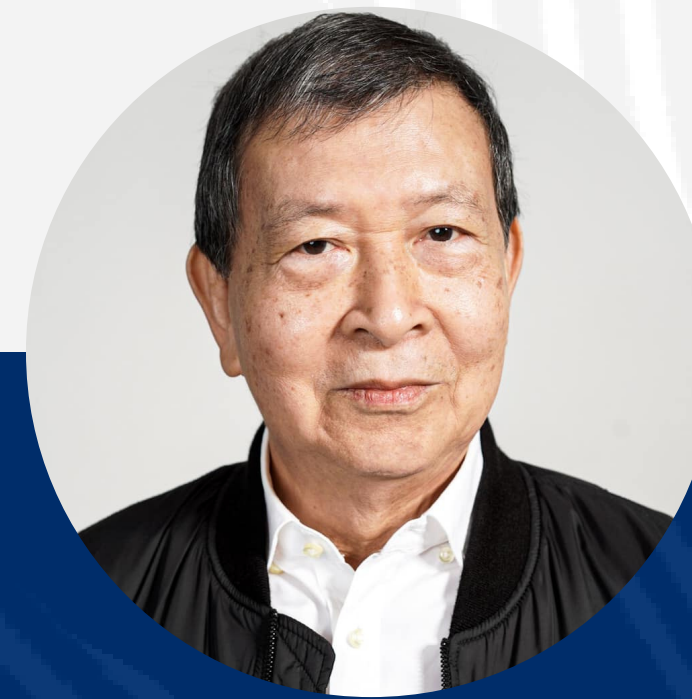
At a time when public health is in the spotlight due to a pandemic, presidential candidates may inevitably align on several of their plans to improve public health conditions in the country. De Guzman, Lacson, and Robredo highlight plans for free and widespread access to vaccination. Raising wages of health workers is also a priority for many candidates—and are almost always mentioned in passing in interviews—though how this is appreciated and articulated by the candidates vary significantly. Improving public health infrastructure also figures in many of the candidates' plans, including those of Domagoso, Lacson, Pacquiao, and Robredo.



**De Guzman's** "Bagong Pulitika, Bagong Ekonomiya" platform indicates that the candidate aims to prioritize public health based on primary healthcare and to guarantee free quality healthcare.[18] In a version of his platform found in his website, he also aims to prioritize COVID-19 response by facilitating universal access to vaccines, mass testing, contact tracing, and isolation facilities. He also promises to raise wages and benefits of health workers.[19]



**Domagoso's** "Bilis Kilos 10 Point Agenda" includes an agenda item on health, encapsulated in the catchphrase "*Ikaw muna: kalusugan at kagamutang abot kaya.*"[20] He has expressed his plans to establish more public hospitals in his television ad [21] and in various interviews, saying that he will establish hospitals and health centers with 107,000 hospital beds in his first 1,000 days in office.[22] He also stated that he will give out scholarships (similar to Robredo's plan) to 10,000 medical students every year to attain the ratio of one doctor per 1,000 Filipinos; increase salaries of nurses and healthcare workers (similar to de Guzman and Pacquiao); and draft a "Pandemic Response Roadmap" to be distributed on December 31, 2022.[23] In a televised debate, he said, among others, that he wants PhilHealth to be managed by financial experts; achieve security of tenure for medical personnel; and prioritize mental health.[24]



**Gonzales** does not have a definite platform addressing public health, but in his first 100 days as president, he said he will focus on pandemic response and put medical frontliners, as well as the drug and pharmaceutical industry, in the forefront of the response. He will also boost agriculture to produce more nutritious food boosting Filipinos' immunity.[25]



**Lacson's** public health plans include a "responsive healthcare system," which comprises of plans to strengthen the health sector based on "concrete, scientific, and realistic solutions," such as full funding of UHC for more hospital beds, rural health units, and health stations in barangays.[26] Also part of this response is for the national government to mobilize local government-led and private sector-led vaccination campaigns and procurement of COVID-19 pills and anti-viral drugs.[27] He has suggested in interviews that government should study the shift from the pandemic to an "endemic" state.[28]

# Platform & Plans



**Marcos Jr.** has stated in a debate that among his plans is free health insurance for senior citizens.[29] He also said he plans to raise salaries of nurses and healthcare workers in the country and push for a higher budget for healthcare and medical research for COVID-19 recovery, in what he calls the “Tawid-COVID, Beyond COVID” program.[30]



The first point in **Montemayor’s** 10-point agenda is “COVID Solution,” which enumerates the following components: use of medical doctors and health workers in checkpoints, patronizing alternative medicine, and Filipino inventions and solutions in all barangay levels. [31]



**Pacquiao** has laid out his plans on public health protection via interviews and debates. Among others, he aims to legislate a new salary standardization scheme for healthcare workers, who shall have a minimum take-home pay of Php 50,000 per month. He added hospitals and medical facilities could be given tax incentives or subsidies if they cannot afford to fully shoulder the wage increase for their personnel. He also stated that he will pursue and immediately implement the upgrading of all tertiary government hospitals nationwide.[32]



Bannering **Robredo’s** Kalayaan Sa COVID platform is “Kalayaan Mula sa Pangambang Magkasakit”. The plan highlights good governance in addressing COVID-19; programs to “care for carers,”; free and accessible healthcare; vaccines for all; and the need to improve PhilHealth[33]; plans that significantly overlap with the plans of other presidential candidates above, such as Lacson and de Guzman. A recent version of Robredo’s platform, “Angat Buhay sa Kalusugan,” additionally stresses her plan to fill in gaps in hospital beds; improve bed-to-hospital ratios; equip each barangay health unit with new equipment; and provide scholarships for healthcare professionals (similar to Lacson and Domagoso’s plans).[34] In “Angat Buhay sa Nutrisyon,” Robredo commits to enact programs focusing on the first 100 days of a child to prevent stunting, institutionalize feeding programs in schools, and expansion of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) to also address widespread hunger. She also committed to strengthen agriculture to ensure adequate food supply, [35] similar to Gonzales’ plan.

There is no public record or data available on the public health platform or plans of Abella and Mangondato.

# Endnotes

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- [14] Senate website
- [15] HR website
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- [17] See <https://www.joeymontemayor.ph/about>
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## About MEAP FactCheck

G-Watch views the upcoming polls in 2022 as an extremely important terrain that has to be engaged, and that would complement other accountability efforts that are being undertaken before, after and beyond elections. In this light, G-Watch is undertaking a citizenship education initiative that aims to Make Elections an Accountability Platform (MEAP). The first round of MEAP focused on the conduct citizenship education sessions and the convening of multi-stakeholder dialogues.

The 2nd phase of MEAP is taking on the issue of the use of information to make elections an accountability platform. In February, G-Watch's annual awareness-raising campaign *Ako, Ikaw, Tayo May Pananagutan* took on the issue of fake news and disinformation. Hundreds participated in varied activities in 10 G-Watch local sites all over the country.

The other critical component of the 2nd phase of MEAP are activities to check on the candidates' track record and platform on critical issues and agenda: the conduct of Local Candidates Forum targeting local candidates in G-Watch sites all over the country and the production and release of FactCheck Briefs covering key presidential candidates.

The MEAP FactCheck Briefs review the position, platform and track record of key presidential candidates on issues and agenda G-Watch deemed important and critical. Position refers to the candidates' pronouncements about the agenda that can be found in printed materials like news, statements or online. Platform refers to the candidates' plans in tackling the agenda as stated in their official platform. Track record refers to the direct action taken by the candidates in advancing/ realizing the agenda. We determine whether the candidates have taken direct action in terms of bills filed, laws passed, decisions made, programs/ projects personally/ directly championed as stated in official or reliable/ verifiable records. A list of references is provided in every FactCheck brief.

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## Make the 2022 Elections an Accountability Platform!

### Statement of Government Watch (G-Watch) on the Upcoming May Polls

In exactly two months from now, Filipinos will once again go to the polls to elect the country's next President, along with the Vice President, 12 senators, 316 members of the Lower House, as well as 16,055 local officials. While every election is important, the upcoming poll is both unique and extremely crucial due to the ongoing pandemic, and the continuing threats to democracy and to our people's very survival.

The dismal performance of the national government in handling the COVID-19 crisis is going to be the backdrop of the 2022 elections. It has to be. The 2022 elections will also be critical in reaffirming many democratic values that has been under threat for the past years, such as inviolability of human rights, the rule of law, and the principle that a public office is public trust since all power emanates from the people.

The 2022 polls, in other words, has to be turned into an accountability process, where candidates have to be made answerable for their performance or lack thereof.

We call on voters to elect candidates that will restore checks and balances in government, strengthen accountability institutions, uphold merit-based public management, and support independent civil society monitoring and advocacy.

At the same time, G-Watch offers the following agenda for the next administration:

- Ensure access to relevant, useful and clear information.
- Pass the Freedom of Information Law.
- Bolster transparency mechanisms and efforts.
- Ensure that feedback, complaint and grievance redress mechanisms properly work so that the concerns of citizens can be adequately addressed.
- Enhance the capacity of accountability institutions, mechanisms and programs inside government.
- Ensure that the country's legal framework remains supportive, facilitative and enabling of progressive civil society, including independent citizen accountability efforts.

We also call on the Philippine development community to start rebooting, retooling and re-energizing civil society-government engagement to one that synergizes interdependent power which checks abuses at the top and uplifts the most marginalized.

If all these are done, then we can turn elections to what it should be—as a way to allow even the most ordinary of citizens to speak truth to power and change the course of the country's history.

*\* Adopted during the 2022 G-Watch National Meeting & Learning Exchange on March 4-8 in Pasig and Baguio Cities. G-Watch is an independent action research organization embedded in constituencies of civic and advocacy-oriented organizations all over the Philippines that aims to contribute in democratic deepening through the scaling of accountability and citizen empowerment. G-Watch has local sites and partner civil society organizations and government allies in Pasig City, Quezon City, Naga, Puerto Princesa, Cebu, Bohol, Tacloban, Dumaguete, Bacolod, Southern Leyte, Lanao del Sur, Samal Island, and Agusan del Sur.*