



# Digitalizing Health: Mobile App Capacitates Frontliners One Tap at a Time with HEAL Hub Philippines

## About HEAL Hub

HEAL Hub is a digital platform for community health workers that aims to reach **1,500 barangay health workers (BHWs)** in Quezon Province, Philippines, by the **end of 2026**. It is developed to provide customizable solution filling gaps in training, improve access to digital resources and information for BHWs, and ultimately, contribute to closing health information access and equity gaps across multiple municipalities.

HEAL Hub is part of the global CARE program called She Heals the World initiative. The initiative's design is anchored in CARE's Global Health Programs strategy, which intends to positively influence individual assets and capacities, immediate relations, systems, and structures pivotal to health equality. This project aligns with this framework as it focuses on strengthening the capacity of BHWs to deliver quality services and strengthen the local government's health care system through the adoption of digital capacity-building model. The successful uptake and implementation of the HEAL hub will assist in building community trust in BHWs and enhance the overall primary health system in targeted municipalities.

This project is conducted in partnership with the implementing local organization, the Southern Tagalog People's Response Center (STPRC).

### Program Name:

Healthy, Empowered, Accredited,  
Linked Hub: Digital Solutions for  
Frontline Health Workers  
(HEAL Hub)

### Program Country:

Philippines

### Timeframe:

Feb 2024 – Jan 2027

### Donor:

Takeda

### Participants:

**306**

out of 1,500

barangay health workers reached

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## What are "Barangay Health Workers"?

A barangay is synonymous with a village. It is a small territorial district and the most local government level in the Philippines.

BHWs are the frontline health workers who fill a necessary gap in providing basic health services and education within their community. Unlike trained nurses, they primarily serve as volunteers at their local health unit.

**This learning brief presents findings from focus group discussions with 14 BHWs, conducted in November 2024 by our local partner, STPRC.**

“

'How come the BHWs are so hardworking now?'  
Because we have this cellphone now – this is our job and we are learning a lot, like on breastfeeding babies. Everyday someone is on duty now.

”

— A local health worker,  
HEAL Hub participant



## Successes So Far

- **Local BHWs find the HEAL Hub app to be an easy, accessible, and a timesaving means to self-capacitate.** They expressed they learn better because of its convenience and minimal distraction, compared to face-to-face training, and because they get to playback lectures at their convenience. They also share the content with their patients to educate them on their health concerns, especially pregnant women.
- **The app readily fills gaps in training.** Before getting trained on the app, some BHWs had been serving their local health unit for 3-5 years without basic training. From the [baseline study](#), 40% of BHWs hadn't received formal training or certifications due to limited funding and mostly relied on their leaders' coaching. Using the app makes them feel like they have "attended many training sessions." They also mentioned that it teaches them modern health practices, such as those related to nursery care for babies.
- **BHWs have increased confidence and motivation because of added knowledge.** Community members have noticed increased diligence from the BHWs, with the local health unit now staffed daily. BHWs rated their new confidence as health educators in their local community 4 out of 5. When asked what topics they gained more confidence in, a BHW shared "In caring for pregnant women. That's typically the work we need to do. And after childbirth, caring for the child." Added knowledge enables them to serve better, particularly in prenatal care, delivery, and childcare.
- **BHWs feel valued and that "health is given more focus."** They share that receiving a mobile phone from the project has made them feel invested in and valued and it's the first time they have experienced such an easy means of training. It has also offered an improved means of communication and learning between one another.
- **Roles are clearer.** The modules offer BHWs a better understanding of the scope of their functions and that of other health practitioners. This enabled a better sense of ownership for BHWs of their roles. This also includes their limitations and how to better set expectations and conduct themselves towards patients.

## Challenges

- **User interface and content translations need to be improved.** The language used for in-app quizzes uses *Tagalog (Filipino)* that is too formal to comprehend, and some translations are inaccurate. Content also requires further adapting to the Philippine context for users to better relate to the materials. Faulty issues have been experienced when recording answers and aligning multiple choice buttons to their answers, creating user confusion.
- **Financial burden on BHWs.** BHWs have incurred out-of-pocket expenses for internet access and communication during their shifts, as well as for downloading or syncing the app for updates.

# Learning and Recommendations

## Rural health units and government personnel are encouraging and supportive of BHWs to learn using the HEAL Hub app

A prominent enabling factor is that rural health units and government coordinators encourage the BHWs to use the app and check on their learnings. The coordinator frequently visits the local health unit, especially during training sessions, and is privy to their needs. This is a testament for us as practitioners to meaningfully engage with influential stakeholders through getting their buy-in and support. This creates an enabling environment for the project's target participants.

## BHWs suggest adding SRH, malnourishment, cancer, and mental health in the app's covered modules

BHWs recommend including content on sexual and reproductive health (e.g. birth control pills and other contraceptives, side effects, pregnancy, practices, etc.), vitamins for malnutrition, cancer, and mental health, as they have noticed the need from the increase in cases, but lack the knowledge to understand its causes let alone address these issues effectively.

## BHWs call for improved compensation and sufficient timely budget for their local health unit

The current benefit for BHWs as service providers is limited to free medicine accessible at the municipal office. They express the need for insurance (e.g. coverage for accidents while on duty, contracting infections, etc.), health hazard pay, and the regular payment of salaries. They call for additional incentives and benefits for local health workers, as they work voluntarily. They mentioned this may include livelihood support as well to provide additional income.

The local health unit faces challenges due to a slow granting process, limited funding, and a need for additional health equipment. This may be an opportunity to advocate for sufficient and timely budgeting for local health workers, increased compensation, and benefits.



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### Quotes from the participating barangay health workers:

**"What improved was it seems health is given more attention. There are also more seminars 'attended' (through the app), because before, you wait for someone to say, 'Hey let's go, there's a new BHW training.'"**

**"In face-to-face training, you need to take notes (on the lectures) to not forget. But with something digital like this, 'Oh I forgot something' [gestures opening cellphone] 'Ah this is what I should do.'"**

**"This is with you constantly now. Whatever time you want to train or want to view the topic, you can do right away."**

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