The Network: Towards Unity for Health (TUFH) 2026 Conference

The Network: Towards Unity for Health (TUFH) 2026 Conference was held from 4–7 August 2026 in Manila, Philippines, hosted by the University of the Philippines Manila in collaboration with Mapúa University, Ocugen, and TDR/SIHI Woods System of Care. The conference brought together 377 participants from 37 countries, including health professionals, educators, students, researchers, policymakers and other health-sector stakeholders.

TUFH is a global, interprofessional and intergenerational organization committed to advancing health equity and social accountability. It brings together health leaders, educators, students and policymakers to challenge conventional approaches to health education and health service delivery and to promote systems that respond to community health priorities. TUFH is a WHO Affiliate and operates as an official non-state actor in official relations with the World Health Organization. Its activities include an annual global conference, fellowships and academies, and Centers of Excellence that recognize institutions demonstrating leadership in socially accountable health professions education and practice.

The theme of the 2026 conference was "Bayanihan for Health Equity: Co-creating Social Innovations for Responsive and Resilient Health Systems." Bayanihan is a Filipino concept emphasizing communal unity, collective action and mutual support. The theme highlighted the importance of working together across communities, professions, institutions and generations to address health inequities and develop sustainable health solutions.

The conference focused on four major subthemes: community-driven health systems; equity by design through technology, data and innovation; strengthening the global health workforce; and translating policy into practice through local partnerships. These themes reflected the need to ensure that health systems are responsive to local needs, that innovation reduces rather than increases inequity, and that health workers are appropriately trained, supported and equitably distributed, particularly in underserved communities.

The conference was officially opened by the Chancellor of the University of the Philippines Manila, who emphasized the value of face-to-face engagement and partnerships in advancing scientific progress. The Chancellor described conferences such as TUFH as a form of Bayanihan, bringing people from diverse backgrounds together to develop partnerships that transcend borders. The participation of students alongside global health leaders was particularly emphasized as an important feature of the meeting.

The programme included keynote presentations, plenary sessions, workshops, oral and poster presentations, networking activities and visits to communities and health programmes across Manila. The site visits provided participants with opportunities to move beyond academic discussions, interact with local health workers and communities, understand local experiences and appreciate the practical realities of delivering responsive health services. Participants also had the opportunity to experience Filipino culture and community life.

Six thematic summits generated considerable interest, addressing specific areas of health equity, including intellectual and developmental disabilities and autism, integrated behavioural health, women's health, rural and remote health, and ageing and health. These sessions highlighted the need for health systems to respond to the different needs of population groups and to address geographical, social and demographic barriers to accessing care.

A key outcome of the conference was the Bayanihan Declaration, which reaffirmed that health equity is a shared responsibility requiring collaboration across communities, professions, institutions and countries. The Declaration emphasized meaningful community participation, social accountability, equitable health professions education, strengthening the health workforce, responsible use of technology and data, and the development of responsive and resilient health systems. It also recognized the importance of local knowledge and community-driven innovations in developing sustainable health solutions.

The accompanying Call to Action emphasized the need to translate these commitments into practical measures. Stakeholders were encouraged to place communities at the centre of health-system planning, strengthen socially accountable health professions education, improve recruitment and retention of health workers in underserved areas, use technology and data to advance equity, strengthen partnerships, translate evidence and policy into practice, and support the scaling of successful community-driven innovations. The Call to Action also encouraged interprofessional and intergenerational collaboration and emphasized the importance of measurable commitments and sustained implementation.

The conference was highly relevant to global health, particularly in relation to equitable access to health services, rural and remote service delivery, health workforce distribution, infrastructure, technology and community participation. The discussions reinforced the importance of strengthening partnerships between communities, government, academic institutions, health facilities and other stakeholders.

Overall, TUFH 2026 provided an important platform for global learning, networking and collaboration. Its central message was that health equity requires collective action and co-creation with communities. The Bayanihan Declaration and Call to Action provide a framework for moving from dialogue to practical action and offer valuable lessons for strengthening community-responsive, equitable and resilient health systems.

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