Using human-centered design approaches to develop innovative models for delivery of essential health services in three Philippine rural communities during the COVID-19 pandemic
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COVID-19-related health system disruptions brought about changes in the delivery of health services. The project aimed to document patient experiences and co-create innovative strategies with the community in accessing essential health services (EHS) during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Three Philippine municipalities were selected. Key informant interviews and focus group discussions were conducted among end-users and healthcare workers who were involved in EHS (Maternal and Child, TB/HIV, NCD, and COVID-19) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the human-centered design (HCD) approach, patient journey mapping, world cafe, and prioritization grid activities were conducted with community members (healthcare providers and patients) to design and select innovative health service delivery strategies adapted to the new normal. The different activities resulted in forming a comprehensive perspective of key needs and gaps of local health systems during the COVID-19 pandemic. The main themes identified are related to health systems delivery disruptions, local government response and adaptations, and challenges in community engagement and mobilization. The HCD activities facilitated the co-creation of an innovative pathway which is a blend of a telemedicine platform and the engagement of volunteer community health workers as teleconsult facilitators. The effects of the digital divide were observed when comparing the accessibility of healthcare providers and patients. This was most prevalent in remote, underserved areas, where internet and network connectivity is sparse and intermittent. The findings can help inform policymakers when designing innovative health service platforms.