

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

NINETEENTH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

House Bill No. **10545**



Introduced by Honorable Ma. Alana Samantha Taliño Santos

**AN ACT INSTITUTING A NATIONAL HEALTH PROGRAM TO COMBAT
SYSTEMIC LUPUS ERYTHEMATOSUS (SLE) DISEASE AND APPROPRIATING
FUNDS THEREFOR**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), or “lupus,” is a long-term autoimmune illness. In lupus, the body's immune system that normally protects from infection and disease, turns haywire and causes inflammation and damage to the body's cells and organs.¹ Diagnosing SLE can be challenging because its symptoms can mimic those of other conditions. Diagnosis often involves a combination of medical history, physical examination, laboratory tests (including blood tests and urine tests), and sometimes imaging studies.

In the Philippines, SLE poses a significant health challenge, albeit with varying levels of awareness and access to care across different regions. Accordingly, lupus occurs in around 30 to 50 per 100,000 people. Around 9 in 10 adults living with lupus are women. The symptoms usually start when they are between 20-40 years old. SLE can also affect men, the elderly, and even children.²

While awareness of SLE has increased in recent years due to efforts by healthcare professionals, patient advocacy groups, and government initiatives, there remains a need for more widespread education about the disease. Apart from that, access to certain medications and advanced treatments such as biologic agents remains to be a challenge due to it being limited or costly for some patients.

Given this situation, it is of paramount importance to address the underlying status of lupus cases in the country. The creation of a national health program can educate the public, healthcare providers, and policymakers, leading to earlier detection, diagnosis, and management of SLE. Likewise, it can promote standardized diagnostic criteria, provide training for healthcare professionals, and ensure access to specialized care and evidence-based treatments for individuals with SLE.

Thus, the immediate passage of this measure is earnestly sought.

HON. MA. ALANA SAMANTHA TALIÑO SANTOS
Representative, 3rd District of Cotabato

¹ <https://www.healthphilipinas.ph/health-a-z/systemic-lupus-erythematosus#:~:text=In%20the%20Philippines%2C%20lupus%20occurs,between%2020%2D40%20years%20old>

² Ibid

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Be it enacted by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:

Section 1. ***Short Title.*** – This act shall be known as the "Comprehensive Lupus Prevention Act."

Section 2. ***Declaration of Policy.*** - It is the policy of the State to protect and promote the right to health of the people. As such, the State shall promote awareness of the health programs focusing on Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE) to empower citizens suffering therefrom to become, to the best of their potential, independent, self-reliant, and productive members of society.

Section 3. ***Definitions.*** – The following term shall have the following meaning:

- a. "Systemic Lupus Erythematosus" (SLE) or "Lupus" shall be construed to mean a chronic autoimmune disease where the immune system attacks the body's cells and tissue, resulting in inflammation and tissue damage in different parts of the body, but most often affecting the heart, joints, skin, lungs, blood vessels, liver, kidneys, and nervous system, as diagnosed by a competent medical practitioner.

Section 4. ***National Survey and Research.*** - The National Institute of Health (NIH) shall conduct an annual survey to determine the extent and total incidence and prevalence of persons with SLE in the country for the government to provide the necessary health interventions to address the needs faced by persons with lupus.

Section 5. ***Integrated Approach to Research in Cooperation with Concerned Research Agencies.*** - Within six (6) months from the date of effectivity of this Act, the Department of Health (DOH) shall ensure that there is no conflict of interest between the NIH's research agenda and that of pharmaceutical corporations or other government agencies addressing the issue of lupus.

Section 6. ***National Program for Lupus Prevention and Treatment.*** - The DOH shall implement a comprehensive and nationwide program on lupus prevention and treatment with the following objectives:

- a. to promote and provide mechanisms for early identification, screening, and diagnosis of persons suffering from lupus;
- b. to promote public awareness, education, and information on issues concerning lupus;
- c. to establish sustainable support network for families of persons diagnosed with lupus;
- d. to provide referral services to patients for appropriate educational and medical expertise and to identify appropriate education or medical facilities suited to the needs of patients;
- e. to undertake research and collaborate with other institutions for the conduct of research activities pertaining to the disease;

- f. to promote an advocacy discouraging bias against and stereotyping of afflicted persons;
- g. to provide an avenue for the sharing of best practices on issues relating to early detection, prevention, cure, treatment, and rehabilitation of persons diagnosed with lupus; and
- h. to network with other organizations, institutions, and professionals working on public programs for persons diagnosed with lupus;

Section 7. ***Programs and Service for Lupus Prevention.*** - The programs and services that will be provided by the DOH shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

- a. orientation and counseling services for families of newly diagnosed persons;
- b. establishment of national and regional referral services where the DOH shall maintain an updated list of health care institutions and practitioners concerned with the treatment of lupus;
- c. publish a newsletter on current developments and research on lupus, as well as other reading materials on the early detection, prevention, and treatment of lupus, and best practices for the care of diagnosed persons;
- d. conduct of continuing education and training programs on the proper care of diagnosed persons; and
- e. establishment of a databank and an information and monitoring system on country-specific statistics pertaining to lupus.

Section 8. ***Lupus Early Detection and Screening Fees.*** - The Philippine Health Insurance Corporation shall include the cost of early detection and screening programs for lupus as one of the available benefits to its members. The early detection and screening test fees shall be applied to, among others, testing cost, education, follow-up, and readable overhead expenses.

Section 9. ***Donations and Grants*** - The DOH, NIH, and other departments of the DOH that may thereafter be tasked with the implementation of this Act shall have the power to receive donations and grants from local and international donor institutions, foundations, and foreign donor agencies, subject to prior clearance and approval of the President or his authorized representative based on the recommendation of the Secretary of Finance. Provided, that pertinent laws and rules on the receipt, accounting, and disbursement thereof shall be complied with.

Section 10. ***National Lupus Awareness Week.*** - In order to grow national interest and participation in the issues and concerns of lupus patients, the first week of May shall annually be celebrated as "Lupus Awareness Week." This week-long activity will be spearheaded by the DOH, in coordination with other concerned agencies, institutions, and stakeholders.

Section 11. ***Continuing Education and Training of Health Personnel and Service Providers on Lupus Prevention and Treatment.*** - All DOH staff and health providers providing health services to persons diagnosed with lupus shall undergo a mandatory continuing education and training program to ensure the delivery of up-to-date and relevant services.

Section 12. ***Protection Against Forcible Administration of Medical Treatment or Enrollment in Programs.*** - All persons administering treatment, counseling, or medication as well as all persons involved in the implementation of the DOH programs as mandated in this Act shall respect the right of each patient to determine for himself or herself the medical treatment to be administered as well as the programs wherein he or she will participate, if any.

Section 13. ***Appropriations.*** - The amount necessary to carry out the provisions of this Act shall be included and incorporated in the annual general appropriations of the DOH.

Section 14. ***Implementing Rules.*** - Within sixty (60) days from the enactment of this law, the DOH, in consultation with NIH, PhilHealth and other concerned stakeholders, shall promulgate the guidelines for this Act.

Section 15. ***Separability Clause.*** – If any provision or part thereof, is held invalid or unconstitutional, the remainder of the law or the provision not otherwise affected shall remain valid and subsisting.

Section 16. ***Repealing Clause.*** –Any law, presidential decree or issuance, executive order, letter of instruction, rule or regulation inconsistent or contrary to the provision of this Act is hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

Section 17. ***Effectivity Clause.*** – This Act shall take effect after fifteen (15) days following its publication in the Official Gazette or a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved