

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

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 516



Introduced by **Representative Jaime R. Fresnedi**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

This proposed measure seeks to establish a comprehensive, inclusive, and lifelong framework to support persons with autism (PWAs) in the country through the creation of a Philippine National Autism Care Plan (NACP). The bill mandates the official recognition of all PWAs as persons with disabilities (PWDs), thereby entitling them to the full range of benefits and protections under existing laws.

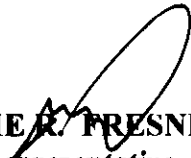
Autism, or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects one's social, behavioral, and communication skills. According to the Center for Autism and Related Disorders (CARD), those with ASD seem to live in a "world of their own" and seek to find meaning in their confusion by insisting on routine activities and repetitive behavior. The Autism Society of the Philippines (ASP) estimates that there are around 1.2 million Filipinos who grapple with the lifelong developmental challenges associated with ASD. However, many cases go undiagnosed due to a lack of awareness, stigma, and inaccessibility or unaffordability of its diagnostic services.

While global awareness and policy interventions have advanced in recent years, our country's support system for this sector remains fragmented and inadequate. In fact, persons with autism remain excluded from the full benefits of existing disability and health policies. They are not explicitly covered by Republic Act No. 7277, or the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities, as the law does not recognize autism as a distinct disability category. Likewise, the Department of Health does not include autism in its official list of disabilities, as individuals with ASD are often classified as having neurological rather than physical or mental disabilities. This policy gap results in their exclusion from critical services and reinforces systemic barriers to inclusion.

Aside from that, government support for PWAs is insufficient and fragmented. It is often limited to urban centers and lacks the necessary inter-agency coordination. Families face numerous challenges in accessing early diagnosis, sustained therapy, inclusive education and gainful employment. As noted by Abundo, Sorongon, and David (2024), these gaps leave PWAs and their families underserved, unrecognized and vulnerable to long-term social exclusion due to the financial, emotional and physical burden this leaves.

This bill is anchored in the State's commitment to building an inclusive, just and empowered society that upholds the inherent dignity of every person. It is in recognition of autism, not as a limitation, but as a condition that requires support.

In view of the foregoing, the immediate passage of this bill is earnestly sought.



JAIME R. FRESNEDI
Representative
Lone District, Muntinlupa City

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Introduced by **Rep. Jaime R. Fresnedi**

AN ACT
INSTITUTING A PHILIPPINE NATIONAL AUTISM CARE PLAN FOR THE
SUPPORT OF PERSONS WITH AUTISM AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

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 “*National Autism Care Plan Act.*”

Sec. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* –It is hereby declared the policy of the State to protect and promote the rights of all persons to full, healthy and holistic development. As such, the State shall promote an environment conducive to the development of persons with autism (PWAs) to become socially-accepted members of an inclusive society. Towards this end, the State commits itself to the establishment of institutional and social mechanisms to support PWAs throughout their lifetime, responsive to their needs, empowering and providing them quality of life.

Sec. 3. *Definition of Terms.* – As used in this Act, the following terms shall be defined as follows:

- a) Autism or Autism Spectrum Disorder refers to a neurological condition characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, communication, as well as by unique strengths, as defined in the latest version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.
- b) Diagnosis refers to necessary assessments, including but not limited to neuro-psychological evaluations, genetic testing, MRIs, hearing tests and psychometric tests to diagnose or discount autism or developmental disabilities in individuals.

- c) Intervention refers to interceding action undertaken to help improve the autism prognosis. Intervention in autism may take the form of medical, pharmacologic, therapeutic, educational and non-traditional habilitative care.
- d) Epidemiology refers to the study and analysis of the distribution and determinants of health conditions, like autism in defined populations.

Sec. 4. *Treatment as Persons with Disability.* – All PWAs shall be treated as persons with disability, as defined under Republic Act No. 7277, as amended. They shall be entitled to all the rights, privileges and benefits provided for persons with disabilities under existing laws.

Sec. 5. Continuing Education and Training on Autism for Public Service Providers. – All officers and staff in charge of providing services to the public, including but not limited to the Department of Health (DOH), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the Department of Education (DepEd), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Department of Justice (DOJ), Department of Transportation (DOTr), Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), Department of National Defense (DND), Department of Science and Technology (DOST), Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDSA), National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA), Persons with Disabilities Affairs offices (PDAOs) at the Local Government Units (LGUs), Public Safety Units (military, police, firemen and other first responders), shall undergo mandatory continuing education to sensitize and empower service providers to become effective frontliners in the delivery of services to PWAs and their families.

Sec. 6. *Epidemiological Surveillance Programs.* – The DOH, in coordination with different academic institutions and non-governmental organizations is hereby mandated to conduct an epidemiological survey to determine the prevalence of autism in the country annually to provide data to government agencies and the private sector, to make necessary services available to PWAs and their families.

Sec. 7. *Evidence-based Research.* – The DOH, the Philippine Council for Health Research and Development (PCHRD) and the National Institute of Health (NIH) are mandated, in coordination with local and international educational institutions, to strengthen its research focus on autism; to invest in clinical and molecular studies and grants to support the development of best practices in autism intervention in the Philippines.

Sec. 8. *Early Detection and Intervention of Autism.* – The DOH, in coordination with the DepEd, is hereby mandated to establish a program for early screening and detection of autism, to provide the appropriate services to children and toddlers with developmental delays associated with autism and to ensure the central PWD registry is updated accordingly.

Sec. 9. *Mandatory PhilHealth Coverage.* – All persons with autism shall be covered by the National Health Insurance Program of the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation

(PHIC). Funds necessary to ensure the enrollment of PWAs, who are currently covered under any existing category, shall be sourced from the National Health Insurance Fund of PHIC, earmarked from the proceeds of sin tax collections, as provided for in Republic Act No. 10351. It shall likewise include the cost of early screening and detection programs, as one of the available benefits of its members.

Sec. 10. Protection Against Discrimination in Schools, Colleges, Universities and Training Institutions. – The DepEd, CHED and TESDA shall formulate or update policies and protocols to ensure that all educational institutions shall be inclusive to learners with autism, in matters including, but not limited to, acceptance to academic or training programs, instructional supports and behavior management.

Sec. 11. Provision for Equal Opportunities for Employment. – The DOLE and the Civil Service Commission (CSC) shall formulate policies and programs to ensure that adult PWAs are provided equal opportunities for gainful employment in the private and public sector.

Sec. 12. Protection against Discrimination in Insurance Coverage. – The Department of Finance (DOF) shall formulate or update policies and protocols to ensure that all insurance providers shall provide PWAs access to life insurance instruments and shall include allied medical procedures (like occupational and speech therapies) in health insurance benefits of policy holders.

Sec. 13. Protection in cases of Disasters and Emergencies. – The DILG and the DND shall formulate the necessary policies and protocols to ensure the military, public safety professional, LGUs and first responders shall provide the necessary life-saving support to PWAs with behavioral and communication challenges.

Sec. 14. Access to Transportation. – The DOTr shall formulate the necessary policies and protocols to ensure PWAs with behavioral and communication challenges and their families are given reasonable accommodation in accessing all forms of transportation by service providers over land, sea and air.

Sec. 15. Reasonable Accommodation in cases of Legal Action. – The DOJ shall formulate the necessary policies and protocols to ensure criminal justice agencies and professionals shall provide the necessary accommodations and protections to PWAs in behavioral and communication challenges, who may be accused of, victims of, or witnesses to crimes.

Sec. 16. The Philippine Council for Mental Health. – The Philippine Council for Mental Health (PCMH), a multi-sector body established by the Mental Health Act to provide for a coherent, rational and unified response to mental health in the country, shall spearhead and coordinate the government actions to address the needs of Filipinos with autism and their families.

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Sec. 17. *The National Autism Care Plan.* – The PCMH, in coordination with other government agencies and stakeholders, shall develop, regularly update and monitor the implementation of the National Autism Care Plan (NACP), a holistic medium-term plan to respond to the needs of PWAs and their families, such as but not limited to financial assistance, therapy, medications and equipment, for the guidance of the stakeholders in the public and private sectors. The PCMH shall likewise coordinate the development and implementation of necessary policies and programs to operationalize the NACP and to ensure the needs of PWAs are served.

Sec. 18. *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.

Sec. 19. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision or part of this Act is declared unconstitutional, the remaining parts or provisions not affected shall remain in full force and effect.

Sec. 20. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, executive orders, issuances, rules and regulations inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed, modified or amended accordingly.

Sec. 21. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in any two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,