

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

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 546



Introduced by **Representative Jaime R. Fresnedi**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

This bill seeks to provide access to emergency services for those in their darkest moments, psychiatric and neurological care for the weary minds, and the Mental Health Gap Action Program (mhGAP) to bridge the divide between illness and recovery.

While the Philippines has made strides in recognizing the importance of mental health, PhilHealth currently only provides limited coverage for mental health disorders. By expanding PhilHealth coverage to include a wide-ranging benefit package for all mental health disorders, we hope to open doors to brighter tomorrows.

In a world teeming with hopes and dreams, there lies a silent struggle, an invisible battle that has raged within the minds and hearts of countless Filipinos - the battle against mental health disorders, which was aggravated by the COVID 19 pandemic. It is a war fought in solitude, where the weapons are courage, resilience, and sometimes, simply the will to survive. These individuals, our fellow citizens, deserve more than silent battles and hidden tears. They deserve our unwavering support, our empathy, and a comprehensive safety net for their emotional well-being.

Mental disorders in the country affect an estimated 11.3% to 11.6% of the population. This translates to about 12.5 million Filipinos suffering from various mental health conditions, predominantly depression and anxiety.¹ The COVID 19 pandemic magnified existing conditions among Filipinos. The pandemic has served as a powerful amplifier, intensifying the relentless voices within, increasing the isolating loneliness, and deepening the profound emptiness that often accompanies mental health issues. The uncertainty, fear, and isolation brought about by the pandemic have further strained the emotional resilience of our people.

The crisis brought by COVID-19 has emphasized the urgency of addressing mental health needs in our nation. Prioritizing the mental health of our citizens is not just an act of

¹ Navigating the Stream: Empowering Filipinos in their Mental Health Journey (Mina WIFF. Navigating the Stream: Empowering Filipinos in their Mental Health Journey. Acta Med Philipp. 2024 Oct 31;58(19):5-6. doi: 10.47895/amp.v58i19.11983. PMID: 39600662; PMCID: PMC11586281.)

compassion. It is an investment in our nation's productivity, resilience, and future. It is a testament of our commitment to building a nation where no one suffers in silence, especially in times when the shadows of adversity are most profound.

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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AN ACT
EXPANDING PHILHEALTH COVERAGE TO INCLUDE BENEFIT PACKAGE TO ALL
MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

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

Section 1. *Short Title.* – This Act shall be known as the “*Comprehensive Mental Health Benefit Act*”.

SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – The State affirms the basic right of all Filipinos to mental health as well as the fundamental rights of people who require health services.

The State commits itself in promoting the well-being of people by ensuring that; mental health is valued, promoted and protected; mental health conditions are treated and prevented; timely, affordable, high quality, and culturally-appropriate mental health care is made available to the public; mental health service are free from coercion and accountable to the service users; and persons affected by mental health conditions are able to exercise the full range of human rights, and participate fully in society and at work free from stigmatization and discrimination.

The State shall comply strictly with its obligations under the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities, and all other relevant international and regional human rights, conventions and declarations. The applicability of Republic Act No. 7277, as amended, otherwise known as the “*Magna Carta for Disabled Persons*”, to person with mental health conditions, as defined herein, is expressly recognized.

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

a) Mental health refers to a state of well-being in which the individual realizes one's own abilities and potentials, copes adequately with the normal stresses of life, displays resilience in the face of extreme life events, works productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a positive contribution to the community;

b) Mental health condition refers to a neurologic or psychiatric condition characterized by the existence of a recognizable, clinically-significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotional regulation, or behavior that reflects a genetic or acquired dysfunction in the neurological, psychosocial, or developmental process underlying mental

functioning. The determination of neurologic and psychiatric conditions shall be based on scientifically-accepted medical nomenclature and best available scientific and medical evidence;

c) Mental disorders refer to conditions that affect a person's thinking, feelings, mood, and behavior. These may be occasional or chronic;

d) Mental Health Gap Action Program (mhGAP) refers to the World Health Organization (WHO) program aimed at scaling up services for mental, neurological, and substance use disorders for countries especially with low- and middle-income.

SEC. 4. *Mental Health Benefit Package.* – Within one (1) year from the effectivity of this Act, the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth), in consultation with the Department of Health (DOH), and key stakeholders such as professional societies, patient organization, and health facilities, shall develop a benefit package for Filipinos with mental health illnesses. This benefit package shall cover all mental health disorders. Also, a minor suffering from mental health disorders shall likewise be benefited by this mental health benefit package. The benefit package shall cover emergency services, psychiatric and neurological services, and Mental Health Gap Action Program (mhGAP).

SEC. 5. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – The Secretary of the DOH, in consultation with key stakeholders, shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations to implement the provisions of this Act.

SEC. 6. *Appropriations.* – The amount necessary to implement this Act shall be charged against the total revenue of PhilHealth, composed of premium contributions from direct contributors and premium subsidies of the government for the indirect contributors.

SEC. 7. *Separability Clause.* – If any portion or provision of this Act is subsequently declared invalid or unconstitutional, other provisions hereof which are not affected thereby shall remain in full force and effect.

SEC. 8. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, decrees, ordinances, administrative order, rules and regulations, or any part thereof, which are inconsistent with this Act are repealed or amended accordingly.

SEC. 9. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette and at least two (2) newspapers of national circulation.

Approved,