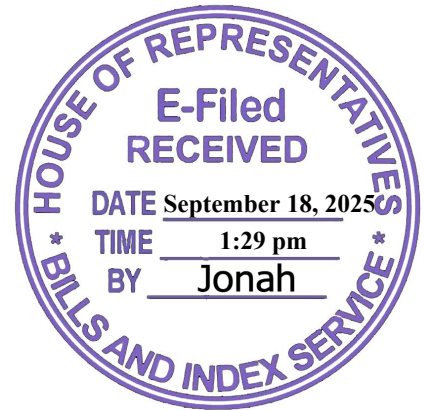




Republic of the Philippines
House of Representatives
Quezon City, Metro Manila

Twentieth Congress
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 4691



Introduced by Representatives Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez, Yedda Marie K. Romualdez, Andrew Julian K. Romualdez, and Jude A. Acidre

AN ACT
INSTITUTIONALIZING A NATIONAL ORAL HEALTH PROGRAM
AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Section 15, Article II of the 1987 Constitution ensures that the right to health of the people is protected and promoted. Complementary thereto, Section 11, Article XIII of the same Constitution mandates the State to adopt an integrated and comprehensive approach to health development, which shall endeavor to make essential goods, health services, and other social services available to all people at an affordable cost.

In the Philippines, oral diseases remain among the most prevalent health problems, with seven out of ten Filipinos suffering from dental caries and almost half experiencing gum disease.¹ Despite this alarming prevalence, oral health has historically been marginalized in the country's healthcare agenda, resulting in limited access to preventive and curative oral health services, especially in rural and underserved communities.

Recognizing that oral health is integral to overall health and well-being, the World Health Organization (WHO) adopted in 2022 the Global Strategy on Oral Health, urging member-states to strengthen oral health systems within primary health care and to shift from curative to preventive approaches. In the Philippines,

¹ Dentists' group says 7 of 10 Filipinos have tooth decay – <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1219293>

Republic Act No. 11223, otherwise known as the Universal Health Care Act, underscores the State's duty to ensure that every Filipino has access to quality, affordable, and comprehensive health services. However, oral health has yet to be fully integrated into the primary healthcare package.

The proposed measure seeks to address this gap by institutionalizing a National Oral Health Program that will:

- Promote preventive oral health care and disease control, particularly among children, pregnant women, and the elderly;
- Establish an Oral Health Service (OHS) under the DOH to provide leadership, standard-setting, and coordination of all oral health activities nationwide;
- Strengthen the Regional Centers for Health Development and mandate the creation of oral health units in all rural health units, ensuring access in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas;
- Enhance human resource development by increasing plantilla positions for dentists, dental hygienists, and trained auxiliaries;
- Mandate capacity development, research, and training in collaboration with CHED, TESDA, PRC, and other stakeholders;
- Expand PhilHealth benefit packages to include a wider range of oral health services; and,
- Promote awareness and preventive practices through a national oral health campaign and the observance of National Oral Health Month every February.

By integrating oral health into the mainstream of health policy and service delivery, this measure will reduce the burden of oral diseases, lower out-of-pocket expenses, and improve the quality of life of millions of Filipinos.

This measure was initially filed in the 18th Congress and was refiled in the 19th Congress.

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



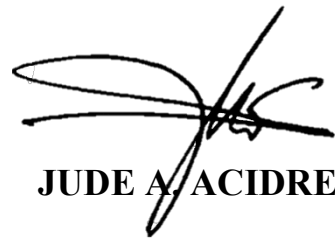
FERDINAND MARTIN G. ROMUALDEZ



YEDDA MARIE K. ROMUALDEZ

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ANDREW JULIAN K. ROMUALDEZ

A stylized handwritten signature in black ink, featuring a large, flowing 'J' and 'A'.

JUDE A. ACIDRE



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

**CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTORY PROVISIONS**

Section 1. *Short Title.* – The Act shall be known as the “*Oral Healthcare Act.*”

Section 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – Recognizing that oral diseases are major public health problems and oral health is integral to general health and essential for the well-being of every people, the State shall adopt an integrated and comprehensive approach to health development which includes the strengthening of the delivery of quality, affordable, accessible and available oral health care.

Towards this end, the State shall endeavor to adopt responsive and efficient policies in oral disease prevention and promotion by scaling up essential programs and increasing investments to make oral health treatment and care more equitable and affordable for all, especially for the underprivileged, poor, and marginalized Filipinos.

Section 3. *Definition of Terms.* – As used in this Act:

- a) *Basic oral healthcare* refers to the essential promotive, preventive, and curative services that include oral examination, toothbrushing drills, scaling or oral prophylaxis, filling of restorable cavities and extraction of unsavable teeth, including referral and check-up of dental clinical cases;
- b) *Orally-fit child* refers to a child who meets the following conditions upon oral examination and/or completion of treatment: (a) caries-free or carious tooth/teeth filled either with temporary or permanent filling materials; (b) have healthy gums; (c) has no oral debris; and (d) no handicapping dento-facial anomaly or no dento-facial anomaly that limits normal function of the oral cavity;
- c) *Oral health* refers to a fundamental component of health and physical and mental well-being that includes the ability to speak, smile, smell, taste, touch, chew, swallow and convey a range of emotions through facial expressions with confidence and without pain, discomfort and disease of the craniofacial complex; and,
- d) *Risk to oral health* refers to poor oral hygiene practices.

CHAPTER II
ORAL HEALTH PROGRAM AND SERVICES

Section 4. *National Oral Health Program.* – There is hereby established a National Oral Health Program, hereinafter referred to as the Program, which shall have the following objectives:

- a) Improve the determinants of oral health;
- b) Integrate oral health promotion and preventive services with general health care system particularly in the implementation of Republic Act No. 11223, otherwise known as the “*Universal Health Care Act*” and Republic Act No. 11148, otherwise known as the “*Kalusugan at Nutrisyon ng Mag-Nanay Act*” as well as health programs such as nutrition, maternal and child health, women’s health and safe motherhood, adolescent, youth and elderly, tobacco and drug abuse, water and sanitation, among others;
- c) Provide timely access to quality basic oral health care and treatment;
- d) Control risks to oral health, especially of the younger population;
- e) Reduce the prevalence rate of dental caries and periodontal diseases;
- f) Improve the oral health conditions of pregnant women and older persons;
- g) Increase the proportion of orally fit children;
- h) Make oral health treatment and care more affordable and accessible;
- i) Integrate the prevention of dental decay and basic oral care in health promotion programs and feeding strategies;
- j) Incorporate prevention and basic oral care activities into the primary health care package of services;
- k) Reorient oral health policy and planning away from a conventional model of restorative dentistry towards a preventive model of care that promotes oral health; and,

- l) Ensure the provision of oral health assessment, nutrition services and interventions at the different life stages, topical fluoride therapy, pits and fissure sealant application, oral prophylaxis, and permanent fillings, among other services.

Section 5. *Strengthening of the Regional Centers for Health Development in the Provision of Oral Health Services.* – The Secretary of Health shall strengthen the Regional Centers for Health Development in the provision of oral health services by undertaking the following activities:

- a) Provide basic package of essential oral health services for every lifecycle group such as infants, pregnant women, children, adolescent and youth, and senior citizens;
- b) Provide outreach programs and activities in unserved and underserved areas of the country;
- c) Undertake public information and education programs to train the public on oral hygiene;
- d) Train and enhance the capability of oral health providers in both public and private hospitals; and,
- e) Ensure that monitoring services are extended as far as practicable, at the lowest local level health unit

CHAPTER III ORAL HEALTH SERVICE

Section 6. *Oral Health Service (OHS).* – There is hereby established an Oral Health Service, hereinafter referred to as the OHS, under the Department of Health (DOH) to ensure the promotion and delivery of quality, affordable, accessible, and available oral health care. It shall take overall responsibility for

policy development, standard setting, coordination, and integration of all oral health activities.

The OHS shall be headed by a Director who shall be designated to provide operational leadership, undertake coordination with stakeholders and ensure effective and sustainable implementation of the Program. The Director must be a dentist of good moral character and must have practiced clinical dentistry for a period of not less than ten (10) years with relevant background in the area of disease prevention and control or public health for not less than five (5) years.

The OHS shall have the following units: Standards, Policy and Planning Unit; Research, Surveillance, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit; Logistics Management and Supply Unit; Administrative Unit; and such other units as may be deemed necessary in the interest of the efficient and effective delivery of oral health services.

Section 7. Powers and Functions. – The OHS shall exercise the following powers and functions:

- a) Formulate and recommend policies, standards, guidelines and techniques on oral health services;
- b) Develop and oversee the implementation of the Program that aims to define and address the oral health burden of the country. The role and obligations of government agencies and stakeholders shall be clearly defined and shall endeavor to specify national and regional oral health indicators that is responsive, evidenced-based and culturally sensitive;
- c) Coordinate and oversee the provision of oral health services in all hospitals of the national government and local government units;

- d) Provide consultative and training services to non-government agencies on development of oral health care programs and research;
- e) Initiate the formulation and conduct of basic, applied and operational researches for the prevention of oral health disease and feasibility studies for the improvement of oral health care delivery system;
- f) Coordinate and oversee capacity building in the development of human resources for oral health in partnership with Professional Regulations Commission (PRC), academe, including state colleges and universities (SUCs), Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), oral health professional organizations, students of dentistry, dental hygiene and dental technicians;
- g) Supervise and coordinate all oral health activities of DOH–Centers for Health Development; and,
- h) Provide technical assistance on oral health in DOH–Centers for Health Development and with the Ministry of Health-Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (MOH-BARMM), and local government units.

CHAPTER IV

HUMAN RESOURCES FOR ORAL HEALTH

Section 8. *Personnel Complement.* – To ensure the effective implementation of this Act, the personnel complement currently assigned for the existing oral health program of the DOH under the Family Health Office of the Disease Prevention and Control Bureau shall be transferred to the OHS. The Secretary of Health shall, in coordination with the Secretary of Budget and Management (DBM), address human resource needs by creating the additional plantilla positions for oral health professionals and necessary personnel required

in the Program: Provided, That deployment to Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs) shall be prioritized. It shall ensure that salaries of oral health professionals in the public sector are competitive.

Human resource development for oral health shall be geared towards the development of adequate, appropriate, competent and highly motivated health professionals and trained auxiliaries to manage and provide quality oral health services.

Section 9. *Capacity Development.* – The DOH, in collaboration with oral health professional societies, LGUs leagues, and LGU-based associations, academic institutions, civil society organizations, and the private sector, shall formulate, implement and update capacity development program for all health care workers providing oral health services/care and support at all levels of the health care system. The capability of public health systems and facilities in the provision of oral health services shall also be strengthened through the following activities:

- a) Allocation of adequate resources to ensure the provision of essential oral health services;
- b) Provision of relevant, timely, and accurate information management system for oral health; and,
- c) Build up highly motivated health professionals and trained auxiliaries to manage and provide quality oral health care.

CHAPTER V

ORAL HEALTH AWARENESS AND PROMOTION

Section 10. *Oral Health Awareness Campaign.* – The DOH shall intensify its oral health awareness campaign and provide the latest and evidence-based information for the prevention and treatment of oral diseases. The DOH, in collaboration with the Department of Information and Communications Technology, shall make full use of the latest technology to disseminate information to reach every Filipino. The awareness campaign must increase oral health literacy and understanding of risk factors associated with oral disease.

Section 11. *National Oral Health Month.* – The month of February of every year shall be known as the “National Oral Health Month” throughout the Philippines. The DOH, in collaboration with the Philippine Information Agency, local government units, dental societies, and academic institutions, shall lead the observance of the National Oral Health Month.

Section 12. *Oral Health Promotion and Advocacy.* – The Health Promotion Bureau of the DOH shall develop a comprehensive oral health communication plan that will encompass promotion, communication and advocacy of oral health across the life stages applicable for all settings. Additional positions shall be created to complement the oral health services, patient’s education and public health promotions. The DOH as the overall steward for health care, shall strengthen national efforts in providing a comprehensive and coordinated approach to health development with emphasis on scaling up health promotion and preventive care.

CHAPTER VI

ORAL HEALTH SERVICE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS

Section 13. *Oral Health Program in Local Government Units.* – All provinces, cities, municipalities, and barangays shall implement their respective

oral health programs in accordance with the National Oral Health Program. Local government units shall ensure the delivery of quality, affordable, accessible, and available oral health services in their respective health facilities.

Section 14. *Oral Health Unit in Rural Health Unit.* – In pursuit of the primary health care approach in the delivery of health services, there is hereby created an oral health unit in every rural health unit. The Oral Health Unit shall be composed of a public health dentist and a trained Barangay Health Worker as a dental aide who shall act to promote preventive oral healthcare in the rural areas.

CHAPTER VII REGULATION

Section 15. *Incorporation of Oral Health in the Standards, Licensing, Regulation, Quality Assurance, Monitoring and Evaluation of Health Facilities.* – The Health Facilities and Services Regulatory Bureau (HFSRB) of the Department of Health shall incorporate oral health in the standards, licensing, regulation, quality assurance, monitoring, and evaluation of health facilities. Likewise, the HFSRB shall employ Dentist IV and Dentist III positions to complement their human resource requirements.

Section 16. *Prevention of Illegal Practices in Oral Health.* – The Professional Regulatory Commission (PRC) shall adopt an effective regulatory framework, in consultation with the Philippine Dental Association (PDA), to prevent illegal practices in the oral health profession.

CHAPTER VIII FINAL PROVISIONS

Section 17. *PhilHealth Benefits.* – The Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) shall expand its benefit packages for oral health services in both adults and children. The development and expansion of PhilHealth benefits shall go through proper, transparent and standardized prioritization process in accordance with the appropriate provisions of the UHC Act.

Section 18. *Annual Report.* – The Secretary of Health shall submit to the Committees on Health of the Senate and the House of Representatives an annual report on the progress of the implementation of this Act.

Section 19. *Appropriations.* – The amount necessary for the implementation of this Act shall be charged to the current appropriations of the DOH. The amount for the continued implementation of this Act shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

Section 20. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – The DOH, in consultation and coordination with appropriate national government agencies, non-government organizations, private sector representatives, and other stakeholders, shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations for the effective implementation of this Act no later than one hundred eighty (180) days upon the effectivity of this Act.

Section 21. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision of this Act is held invalid or unconstitutional, the same shall not affect the validity and effectivity of the other provisions hereof.

Section 22. *Repealing Clause.* – All other laws, decrees, executive orders and rules and regulations contrary to or inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed, modified or amended accordingly.

Section 23. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in any newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,