



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

Twentieth Congress
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 6759



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

AN ACT
ESTABLISHING A RURAL TELEHEALTH SUPPORT FUND TO EQUIP
AND TRAIN RURAL HEALTH UNITS (RHUs) FOR
TELECONSULTATIONS WITH MEDICAL SPECIALISTS, AND FOR
OTHER PURPOSES

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Article II, Section 15 of the 1987 Constitution provides that the State shall protect and promote the right to health of the people and instill health consciousness among them.

In the Philippines, access to health care in rural areas is limited due to lack of resources. Challenges include a shortage of healthcare providers, long travel times for patients, inadequate infrastructure, and poor information dissemination.

Thus, this bill seeks to create a Rural Telehealth Support Fund to be administered by the Department of Health (DOH), intended to purchase equipment necessary for teleconsultations, establish reliable internet connectivity in Rural Health Units (RHUs), provide training programs for physicians, nurses, midwives, and barangay health workers (BHWs), develop a referral linkage between RHUs and

tertiary hospitals or specialty centers; and maintain repair, and upgrade telehealth equipment.

Through this bill, the State will be able to fulfill its duty of ensuring equitable access to quality health care across the country, particularly in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas by providing timely specialist care and reducing the burden of travel for underserved populations.

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



FERDINAND MARTIN G. ROMUALDEZ



YEDDA MARIE K. ROMUALDEZ



ANDREW JULIAN K. ROMUALDEZ



JUDE A. ACIDRE



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*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 “*Telemedicine for Rural Communities Act*”.

SEC. 2. Declaration of Policy. - It is the policy of the State to ensure equitable access to quality health care across the country, particularly in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs). To realize this, the State shall support

rural health units in leveraging digital health technologies such as telemedicine to provide timely specialist care and reduce the burden of travel for underserved populations.

SEC. 3. Rural Telehealth Support Fund. - There is hereby created a Rural Telehealth Support Fund, to be administered by the Department of Health (DOH), to finance the procurement of telemedicine equipment and the training of health personnel in rural health units for the delivery of teleconsultations with medical specialists.

SEC. 4. Coverage and Scope. - The Fund shall be used for:

- a.) Purchase of equipment necessary for teleconsultations (e.g., high-definition webcams, microphones, diagnostic peripherals, and telemedicine software;
- b.) Establishment of reliable internet connectivity in Rural Health Units (RHUs) through satellite, fiber, or wireless technology;
- c.) Training programs for physicians, nurses, midwives, and barangay health workers (BHWs) on telemedicine protocols, patient data handling, and referral systems;
- d.) Development of referral linkages between RHUs and tertiary hospitals or specialty centers; and
- e.) Maintenance, repair, and upgrading of telehealth equipment.

SEC. 5. Implementation. - The DOH, in coordination with the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), PhilHealth, and local government units (LGUs), shall:

- a.) Identify priority RHUs based on need, population served, and lack of access to specialist care;
- b.) Develop national telehealth service protocols, including referral mechanisms, documentation standards, and cybersecurity policies;
- c.) Maintain a directory of partner specialists and institutions willing to accept tele-referrals; and
- d.) Ensure interoperability where applicable.

SEC. 6. Capacity Building and Human Resources Development. - The DOH shall conduct regular capability-building sessions and continuing education for RHU staff on the following:

- a) Operation and troubleshooting of telemedicine platforms;
- b) Remote diagnostics and initial management of common specialty cases; and
- c) Patient privacy and data protection in teleconsultation settings.

SEC. 7. Integration with PhilHealth. - PhilHealth shall ensure that teleconsultations facilitated by RHUs under this program are eligible for coverage and reimbursement under primary care or outpatient benefit packages, in accordance with Universal Health Care (UHC) principles.

SEC. 8. Public-Private Partnerships. - The DOH may partner with private hospitals, medical societies, academic institutions, and telehealth providers to enhance access to specialist care and share platforms, networks, and expertise.

SEC. 9. Appropriations. - The amount necessary for the initial implementation of this Act shall be charged against the current year's appropriation of the DOH. Thereafter, such amount shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

SEC. 10. Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR). - Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the DOH, in consultation with the DICT, DILG, NPC, and LGU health officers, shall issue the IRR necessary to carry out the provisions of this Act.

SEC. 11. Separability Clause. - If any provision of this Act is held unconstitutional, the remainder shall not be affected thereby.

SEC. 12. Repealing Clause. - All laws, decrees, executive orders, and rules inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SEC. 13. Effectivity. - This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the *Official Gazette* or a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,