

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 9009



Introduced by HON. PHILIP CONRAD "DOK BONG" M. ACOP

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

EXPLANATORY NOTE

For years, many Filipino families have lived in a quiet state of emergency. Behind closed doors, parents navigate the intricate, often overwhelming world of "the spectrum," frequently doing so without a map, a compass, or a safety net. The introduction of the National Autism Care Plan Act is a profound signal from the State that these families no longer have to walk this path alone.

By shifting the perspective from charity to a mandated "National Autism Care Plan," the bill recognizes that Persons with Autism (PWAs) are not just individuals in need of care, but citizens entitled to a "full, healthy, and holistic development." This legislation is necessary because it moves beyond the current fragmented approach to disability, establishing a lifetime support mechanism that bridges the gap between a toddler's first diagnosis and an adult's pursuit of a career.

Autism spectrum disorder is a condition related to brain development that affects how people see others and socialize with them. This causes problems in communication and getting along with others socially. The condition also includes limited and repeated patterns of behavior. The term "spectrum" in autism spectrum disorder refers to the wide range of symptoms and the severity of these symptoms.¹

Autism spectrum disorder begins in early childhood. Over time, it can cause difficulty functioning in society. For example, people with autism spectrum disorder may have problems being social or when in school or at work. Often children show symptoms of autism within the first year of life. A small number of children with the condition appear to develop as expected in

¹ <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/autism-spectrum-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20352928>

the first year. Then between 18 and 24 months of age, they may lose some skills and develop autism symptoms.²

While there is no panacea for the unique way an autistic brain is wired, there is a powerful catalyst for change: time. In the delicate, formative years of preschool, early intervention acts as a master key, unlocking potential and softening the sharpest edges of the spectrum. For many children, these early sessions of therapy and support do not just bridge developmental gaps, they rewrite the narrative of their future, turning a world of static into a lifetime of connection.

This Act does not only focus on healthcare; it mandates the increased sensitivity and acceptance of everyone from police officers and teachers to transport providers and insurance companies. It treats autism not as a tragedy to be cured, but as a diverse way of being that requires “reasonable accommodation” to allow for true social and economic participation.

If enacted into law, the effects would be transformative for the Philippine social landscape. By mandating PhilHealth coverage for early screening and specialized therapies (Sec. 9), the bill effectively democratizes intervention, ensuring that a child’s progress is not determined by their family’s income. We would see a workforce more inclusive of neurodiversity as the DOLE and CSC create pathways for gainful employment (Sec. 11), and a justice system that finally understands how to protect victims or witnesses with communication challenges (Sec. 15).

Ultimately, this law would replace the invisible walls of discrimination with a structured National Autism Care Plan, turning the Philippines into a society where having autism does not mean being left behind, but being given the specific tools needed to lead a life of dignity and purpose.

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


HON. PHILIP CONRAD “DOK BONG” M. ACOP

² *Id*

Republic of the Philippines

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS

First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 9003

Introduced by HON. PHILIP CONRAD “DOK BONG” M. ACOP

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
neuropsychological 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 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.

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,