

**SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS OF THE )**  
**REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES )**  
*Second Regular Session )*

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**SENATE**

**S.B. No. 1809**

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Introduced by Senator **Ana Theresia "Risa" Hontiveros-Baraquel**

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**EXPLANATORY NOTE**

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurological and developmental disorder with an unknown etiology that affects an individual to communicate and interact with others. It is a lifelong development condition that affects how a person communicates and relates to other people.

The World Health Organization estimates that 1 in every 160 children has an ASD worldwide. In the Philippines, experts and advocates have estimated that there are close to 1,000,000 people with autism.<sup>1</sup> The Autism Society of the Philippines estimates that only 10% of Filipinos with autism are diagnosed and only 5% are receiving appropriate interventions. Studies have also shown that the average annual cost of the interventions designed for a school-aged child is around P180,000.<sup>2</sup>

The 67<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly adopted resolution calling for the strengthening of capacities of national governments to address ASD and other developmental disorders within the context of a broader framework of mental health and disabilities.

This measure proposes actions to strengthen government capacities towards addressing the needs of individuals with ASD and their families. Interventions that focus on protecting the rights and ensuring the well-being of people with ASD, raising public awareness, training and capacity building of public service providers will be undertaken by different government agencies through the Philippine Council for Mental Health established by the Mental Health Law.

Thus, the passage of this bill is earnestly sought.

*Ana Theresia "Risa" Hontiveros-Baraquel*  
**Ana Theresia "Risa" Hontiveros-Baraquel**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2014/04/10/1310840/number-people-autism-increasing#6rsOBIEJr7eMAPYv.99>

<sup>2</sup> Magno Veluz, M et al. Primer on Autism in the Philippines, Autism Society of the Philippines

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Introduced by Senator Ana Theresia "Risa" Hontiveros-Baraquel

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**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 House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:*

1 **SECTION 1. Short Title** – This Act shall be known as the “National Autism Care Plan  
2 Act”.

3  
4 **SECTION 2. Declaration of Policy.** – It is hereby declared the policy of the State to  
5 protect and promote the rights of all persons to full, healthy, and holistic development.  
6 As such, the State shall promote an environment conducive to the development of  
7 persons with autism (PWAs) to become independent, self-reliant, productive and  
8 socially-accepted members of an inclusive society. Towards this end, the State commits  
9 itself to the establishment of institutional and social mechanisms to support PWAs  
10 throughout their lifetime, responsive to their needs, empowering and providing them  
11 quality of life.

12  
13 **SECTION 3. Definition of Terms** – As used in this Act, the following terms shall mean:

14  
15 (a) “Autism” or Autism Spectrum Disorder refers to a neurological condition  
16 characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors,  
17 communication, as well as by unique strengths, as defined in the latest version of  
18 the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.

19  
20 (b) “Diagnosis” refers to necessary assessments, including but not limited to neuro-  
21 psychological evaluations, genetic testing, MRIs, hearing tests, psychometric  
22 tests to diagnose or discount autism and/or developmental disabilities in  
23 individuals.

24  
25 (c) “Intervention” refers to interceding action undertaken to help improve the autism  
26 prognosis. Intervention in autism may take the form of medical, pharmacologic,  
27 therapeutic, educational, and non-traditional habilitative care.

28  
29 (d) “Epidemiology” refers to the study and analysis of the distribution and  
30 determinants of health conditions, like autism, in define populations.

31  
32 **SECTION 4. Treatment as Persons with Disability** – All PWAs shall be treated as

1 persons with disability, as defined under Republic Act No. 7277, as amended. They shall  
2 be entitled to all the rights, privileges, and benefits provided for persons with disabilities  
3 under existing laws.  
4

5 **SECTION 5. Continuing Education and Training on Autism for Public Service**  
6 **Providers.** – All officers and staff in charge of providing services to the public, including  
7 but not limited to the Department of Health (DOH), Department of Social Welfare and  
8 Development (DSWD), Department of Education (DepEd), Department of Labor and  
9 Employment (DOLE), Department of Justice (DOJ), Department of Transportation  
10 (DOTr), Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), the Department of  
11 National Defense (DND), Department of Science and Technology (DOST), Commission  
12 on Higher Education (CHED), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority  
13 (TESDA), National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA), Persons with Disabilities Affairs  
14 offices (PDAOs) at the Local Government Units (LGUs), Public Safety Units (military,  
15 police, firemen and other first responders), shall undergo mandatory continuing  
16 education to sensitize and empower service providers to become effective front liners in  
17 the delivery of services to PWAs and their families.  
18

19 **SECTION 6. Epidemiological Surveillance Programs.** – The Department of Health, in  
20 coordination with different academic institutions and non-governmental organizations is  
21 hereby mandated to conduct an epidemiological survey to determine the prevalence of  
22 autism in the country annually to provide data to government agencies and the private  
23 sector, to make necessary services available to PWAs and their families.  
24

25 **SECTION 7. Evidence-based Research.** – The DOH, the Philippine Council for Health  
26 Research and Development (PCHRD), and the National Institute of Health (NIH) are  
27 mandated, in coordination with local and international educational institutions, to  
28 strengthen its research focus on autism; to invest in clinical and molecular studies and  
29 grants to support the development of best practices in autism intervention in the  
30 Philippines.  
31

32 **SECTION 8. Early Detection and Intervention of Autism.** – The DOH, in coordination  
33 with the DepEd, is hereby mandated to establish a program for early screening and  
34 detection of autism, to provide the appropriate services to children and toddlers with  
35 developmental delays associated with autism, and to ensure the central PWD registry  
36 are updated accordingly.  
37

38 **SECTION 9. Mandatory PhilHealth Coverage.** – All persons with autism shall be  
39 covered by the National Health Insurance Program of the Philippine Health Insurance  
40 Corporation (PHIC). Funds necessary to ensure the enrolment of PWAs, who are  
41 currently covered under any existing category, shall be sourced from the National  
42 Health Insurance Fund of PHIC, earmarked from the proceeds of sin tax collections, as  
43 provided for in Republic Act No. 10351. It shall likewise include the cost of early  
44 screening and detection programs, as one of the available benefits of its members.  
45

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

1  
2 **SECTION 11. Provision for Equal Opportunities for Employment** – The DOLE and  
3 the Civil Service Commission shall formulate policies and programs to ensure that adult  
4 PWAs are provided equal opportunities for gainful employment in the private and public  
5 sector  
6

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

13 **SECTION 13. Protection in cases of Disasters and Emergencies.** – The DILG and  
14 the DND shall formulate the necessary policies and protocols to ensure the military,  
15 public safety professionals, local government units, and first responders shall provide  
16 the necessary life-saving support to PWAs with behavioral and communication  
17 challenges.  
18

19 **SECTION 14. Access to Transportation.** – The DOTr shall formulate the necessary  
20 policies and protocols to ensure PWAs with behavioral and communication challenges  
21 and their families are given reasonable accommodation in accessing all forms of  
22 transportation by service providers over land, sea and air.  
23

24 **SECTION 15. Reasonable Accommodation in cases of Legal Action.** – The DOJ  
25 shall formulate the necessary policies and protocols to ensure criminal justice agencies  
26 and professionals shall provide the necessary accommodations and protections to  
27 PWAs in behavioral and communication challenges, who may be the accused of,  
28 victims of or witnesses to crimes.  
29

30  
31  
32 **SECTION 16. The Philippine Council for Mental Health** – The Philippine Council for  
33 Mental Health (PCMH), a multi-sector body established by the Mental Health Act to  
34 provide for a coherent, rational and unified response to mental health in the country,  
35 shall spearhead and coordinate the government actions to address the need of Filipinos  
36 with autism and their families.  
37

38 **SECTION 17. The National Autism Care Plan** – The PCMH, in coordination with other  
39 government agencies and stakeholders, shall develop, regularly update, and monitor  
40 the implementation of the National Autism Care Plan (NACP), a holistic medium-term  
41 plan to respond to the needs of PWAs and their families for the guidance of the  
42 stakeholders in public and private sector. The PCMH shall likewise coordinate the  
43 development and implementation of necessary policies and programs to operationalize  
44 the NACP and to ensure the needs of PWAs are served.  
45

46 **SECTION 18. Appropriation.** – The amount necessary to carry out the provisions of  
47 this Act shall be included and incorporated in the annual general appropriations of the  
48 DOH.  
49

50 **SECTION 19. Separability Clause.** – If any provision of this Act is declared invalid or

1 unconstitutional, the provisions not affected thereby shall continue to be in full force and  
2 effect.

3  
4 **SECTION 20. Repealing Clause.** – All laws, executive orders, presidential decrees,  
5 presidential proclamations, letter of instruction, rules and regulations or parts thereof  
6 inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

7  
8 **SECTION 21. Effectivity.** – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days following its  
9 publication in the Official Gazette or in two (2) newspapers of general circulation in the  
10 Philippines.

11  
12 Approved,  
13