

Republic of the Philippines  
Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao  
**BANGSAMORO TRANSITION AUTHORITY**  
Cotabato City

Second Regular Session

**BTA PARLIAMENT**  
BTA Parliament Bill No. 275



**Introduced by:**

MPs Hashemi N. Dilangalen, MD, CHA

**Co-Authored by:**

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**AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH LITERACY AND PROMOTION ON THE EFFECTS AND BENEFITS OF VACCINATION, PROVIDING FOR GOVERNMENT SUBSIDY ON FLU VACCINATION, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFORE AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES**

**EXPLANATORY NOTE**

*“Flu continues to affect the health condition of many Filipinos regularly due to a sudden weather change. With this, flu vaccination remains the best way to prevent the illness. As low flu immunization rollout becomes a recurring problem, the government must double its efforts in addressing the issue of vaccine hesitancy among the locals.”<sup>1</sup>*

The flu, also known as influenza, is a widespread illness in the Philippines, particularly during the holiday season when the weather changes abruptly. The Department of Health (DOH) has recently issued a disease surveillance report cautioning the public about the increasing number of influenza-like cases. From January 1 to August 12, 2023, there have been 114,127 reported cases and counting, which is 52% higher than the 74,957 cases reported during the same period last year.<sup>2</sup>

Seasonal influenza, or the flu, is a respiratory infection that occurs suddenly and lasts for a short period of time. It is a sudden respiratory infection resulting from influenza viruses. There are four distinct types of influenza viruses: A, B, C, and D. Influenza A and B viruses are prevalent, leading to seasonal outbreaks. Influenza A viruses have been responsible for causing global pandemics. The flu tends to spread rapidly in places with high human density, such as schools, shopping centers, markets, and other crowded environments. When an individual infected with the virus coughs or sneezes, tiny droplets containing the viruses are released into the air, potentially infecting those in close proximity. Additionally, the virus can be transmitted through contact with hands contaminated by influenza viruses. It is noteworthy that influenza has the potential to exacerbate symptoms in individuals with pre-existing chronic diseases, and severe cases may escalate to conditions like pneumonia and sepsis.<sup>3</sup>

Every year, there are approximately one billion cases of seasonal influenza, with 3–5 million of these cases classified as severe illnesses. The impact of influenza extends to causing 290,000–

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<sup>1</sup> Dalmacito A. Cordero, Jr. Flu vaccination in the Philippines: challenges and interventions, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10657514/#section2-25151355231213587title> (17 November 2023)

<sup>2</sup> Villanueva R. Flu-like illness up 52% <https://www.philstar.com/nation/2023/09/17/2296789/flu-illness-52-percent> (17 September 2023)

<sup>3</sup> Supra at 1

650,000 respiratory-related deaths annually. Notably, 99% of deaths among children under the age of five with lower respiratory tract infections linked to influenza occur in developing countries.<sup>4</sup>

Vaccines have been used for more than 60 years and to this day, they are essential to control influenza and are considered the best way to prevent it. Immunity from vaccination goes away over time, so annual vaccination is recommended to protect against influenza. While DOH recommends an anti-flu shot yearly, many Filipinos are still hesitant to get vaccinated. Some reasons for the refusal include (1) de-prioritization of vaccination due to consumers being 'too busy', (2) consumer perception of low risk of influenza contraction; (3) lack of awareness among consumers, especially the elderly, regarding the severity of influenza; (4) consumer absence of access to the influenza vaccine and unawareness of the availability of free vaccine for certain groups; (5) affordability challenges for some Filipino families in obtaining vaccines.

Beyond these obstacles, widespread vaccine hesitancy is significantly fueled by the unsettling experience many locals had with Dengvaxia, a dengue vaccine embroiled in controversy. Reports of alleged deaths, particularly among children, linked to Dengvaxia gained attention, with organized relatives, particularly mothers, amplifying their concerns on mainstream and social media. Despite prior approval by the Food and Drug Administration based on scientific evidence, the country suspended the dengue vaccination program and permanently banned the vaccine in 2019<sup>5</sup>. This event severely eroded public trust, extending to other vaccines, notably COVID-19 vaccines, which faced strong negative perceptions and resistance among the public.<sup>6</sup>

To improve flu vaccination rates, the government should conduct extensive campaigns promoting awareness of the vaccine's nature, benefits, and side effects, leveraging various mass media channels, particularly social media. Health workers should clarify misinformation related to the Dengvaxia controversy. Equally crucial is the allocation of a sufficient regional budget for free flu vaccines across age groups or offering affordable options for broader accessibility. Collaboration with private organizations and religious groups can enhance vaccine availability. Implementing a house-to-house setup, especially for senior citizens, would overcome accessibility challenges, allowing health workers to deliver the awareness program and administer vaccinations on-site.<sup>7</sup>



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Member of the Parliament

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<sup>4</sup> World Health Organization. Influenza (Seasonal), [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/influenza-\(seasonal\)?gclid=CjwKCAjwvrOpBhBdEiwAR58-3EorkdepM9ZgKICcgU6owGSpahKS04-GSLKxIMe9mejlQvXI3a6qRoCzzwQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/influenza-(seasonal)?gclid=CjwKCAjwvrOpBhBdEiwAR58-3EorkdepM9ZgKICcgU6owGSpahKS04-GSLKxIMe9mejlQvXI3a6qRoCzzwQAvD_BwE)

<sup>5</sup> Mendoza RU, Dayrit MM, Alfonso CR, et al. Public trust and the COVID-19 vaccination campaign: lessons from the Philippines as it emerges from the Dengvaxia controversy. *Int J Health Plann Manage* 2021; 36: 2048–2055. [PMC free article] [PubMed] [Google Scholar]

<sup>6</sup> Supra at 1

<sup>7</sup> Id

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Introduced by:  
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Co-Authors:

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**AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH LITERACY AND PROMOTION ON THE EFFECTS AND BENEFITS OF VACCINATION, PROVIDING FOR GOVERNMENT SUBSIDY ON FLU VACCINATION, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFORE AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

**Section 1. Short Title.** This Act shall be known as the “Comprehensive Regional Public Health Literacy and Promotion Act of 2024”

**Section 2. Declaration of Policy.** The Bangsamoro Government places significant emphasis on the utmost importance of public health, with a central focus on advancing the overall health and well-being of the Bangsamoro people in all policies and legislations. In line with this commitment, this Act endeavors to cultivate heightened awareness regarding the profound effects and benefits of vaccination. The aim is to mitigate vaccine hesitancy, skepticism, and uncertainty among the population.

It is the fervent aspiration of the Bangsamoro Government to elevate vaccination rates, aiming for comprehensive coverage to safeguard its citizens against preventable diseases. This, in turn, contributes to the overarching goal of enhancing the overall health of the region.

**Section 3. Bangsamoro Public Health Promotion and Communications Unit.** There is hereby created a Public Health Promotion & Communications Unit, herein referred to as ‘Unit’ under the Ministry of Health (MOH), herein referred to as ‘Ministry’. The Unit shall establish and implement evidence-based policies, systems, and communication strategies to equip every Bangsamoro with the adequate literacy and general awareness regarding health, vaccines, and other good health habits.

**Section 4. Unit Functions.** The Unit shall have the following primary functions:

1. **Policy Formulation:** It shall develop evidence-based health promotion policies, particularly on vaccination, and other significant health-related matter
2. **Literacy Enhancement Projects:** It shall design and implement literacy campaign programs to enhance health literacy among the Bangsamoro population, particularly on vaccine and other significant health related issues through media, community events, digital platforms, etc.
3. **Communication Strategy Development:** It shall create comprehensive communication strategies to convey vaccine education and other health-related information, with a focus on clarity and cultural sensitivity.
4. **Collaboration with non-government stakeholders:** It shall collaborate with healthcare professionals, community leaders, NGOs, and private entities to amplify the impact of health promotion initiatives.

5. **Research and Data Analysis:** It shall conduct research on health-related topics, analyze data, and use evidence to inform and refine communication strategies.
6. **Public Engagement Initiatives:** It shall develop and execute initiatives that actively engage the public, encouraging participation and dialogue on health matters.
7. Such other relative functions as may arise.

**Section 5. Unit Composition.** The Unit shall be composed of : (1) Unit Chief; (2) Health Communication Specialist ; (2) Media and Communication Officers; (1) Multimedia and Design Specialist. The MOH shall set the Terms of Reference for the identified positions.

**Section 6. Government Subsidy on Flu Vaccination.** A regional government subsidy shall be provided for flu vaccination to ensure accessibility and affordability for all residents of the region. The subsidy shall cover a portion of the cost associated with flu vaccination. The Ministry shall establish guidelines for the distribution and implementation of the subsidy.

**Section 7: Appropriations.** The MOH shall include in the Ministry's programs, the implementation of this Act, the funding of which shall be included in the annual Bangsamoro General Appropriations Act.

**Section 8: Reporting.** The MOH shall submit bi-annual reports to the Parliament detailing the progress and outcomes of the implementation of the provisions of this Act for the first three years of its implementation.

**SECTION 9. Implementing Rules And Regulation.** The MOH shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations to detail the standards, particularly for Sections 5 and 6 hereof, for the effective implementation of this Act within 90 days from its institution.

**Section 10. Separability Clause.** In the event that any provision of this Act is declared to be unconstitutional or invalid, other provisions thereof that are not affected thereby shall continue to be in force and effect.

**SECTION 11. Repealing Clause.** All other orders and related issuances inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed.

**Section 12. Effectivity.** This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in a newspaper of general circulation in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

**Adopted.**

  
**DR. HASHEMI N. DILANGALEN**  
Member of the Parliament

Certified correct:

**PROF. RABY B. ANGKAL**  
Secretary General

Attested:

**ATTY. PANGALIAN M. BALINDONG**  
Speaker