

# 'IRR on Mental Health Law out soon'

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Doctors and students advocating for the Mental Health law, signed on Thursday by President Duterte, are now gearing up for the formulation of its implementing rules and regulations (IRR).

At a press conference, Philippine Psychiatric Association (PPA) former president Ed Tolentino said they are excited to help in the formulation of the IRR now that the long wait is over.

“There is some pressure to actually work and work hard to come up with the IRR. We ourselves are enthusiastic. Honestly, we are gung-ho over this,” Tolentino said.

He noted that the law provides only 120 days for the IRR and this should come out in November. Tolentino said they do not want to prolong the process because it already took them 17 years and more than 30 versions before the law was approved by Congress and signed by the President.

“It is not perfect, but it is the best version that fits our society, based on our resources which are limited. It upgrades everything on mental health. We don’t want the people to wait any longer,” he added.

For PPA director Violeta Bautista, Republic Act 11036 is a “landmark law that improves the Filipinos’ health care.”

“There is really no health without mental health. The law looks at mental health not simply as the absence of illness but a state of well-being,” she said.

Bautista underscored that the law comes “at a time when it is most needed” because “nowadays, it is hard to find basic mental health care services.”

“Currently, access to treatment is enjoyed more by the may kaya (rich). This should change because the new law recognizes that the need for wellness and treatment are not just ‘rich people’s problems’,” she added.

Citing data of the Department of Health and World Health Organization, Bautista said seven Filipinos turn to suicide every day while one in five Filipino adults suffer from a form of mental health case, the most common of which is depression and schizophrenia.

For 19-year-old student leader PJ Forondo-Tanglao, having the law is a “sign of relief” for those with mental health conditions like him, who is within “autism spectrum” and was diagnosed to have depression two years ago.

Tanglao said having to spend at least P3,500 a month for therapy and medicine is costly for his family.

“But now, help is here. The new law will provide government support to persons with mental health needs,” he added.