QC council passes HIV/AIDS ordinance

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The Quezon City council has approved a landmark measure that seeks to boost efforts to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) that causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

Mayor Joy Belmonte is expected to sign the ordinance soon, which was approved on third and final reading on Dec. 1, coinciding with the global observance of World AIDS Day.

Authored by Councilor Lena Marie Juico, the ordinance adopts Republic Act 11166 or the Philippine HIV and AIDS Policy Act.

The measure seeks to strengthen the city's mechanisms in the delivery of treatment and care services to people living with HIV (PLHIV), as well as reinforce cooperation among stakeholders to eradicate stigma and discrimination associated with the disease.

The ordinance will reorganize the Quezon City STI, HIV and AIDS Council to intensify efforts in developing, reviewing and ensuring the implementation of a comprehensive prevention and control action plan.

On Nov. 22, the city government led various organizations, public health professionals and other partners in committing equitable access to quality, comprehensive and clientcentered services for PLHIV.

"Our treatment coverage is aligned with the national average, but it falls 33 percent short of the UNAIDS' interim target of 95 percent," Belmonte said.

"Our viral load testing coverage is only at 29 percent, which is also below the 95 percent target. We propose to address these by coming up with a comprehensive service delivery network," she added.

Based on data from the city epidemiology and disease surveillance unit, 4,433 of 7,173 residents who underwent testing were diagnosed with HIV.

Belmonte said the comprehensive service delivery network would help the local government in delivering effective, needs-based and targeted HIV programs that will fill the remaining gaps in the city's overall plan.

Some of the programs in the pipeline include making HIV testing available in all 69 health centers in the city, peer counseling and access to antiretroviral treatment as well as the establishment of sundown clinics in Libis and Tandang Sora.

Belmonte stressed the need for multisectoral cooperation to further strengthen programs to prevent the spread of HIV and other STIs.

"Putting a stop to HIV and AIDS requires an all-out collective effort," she said. "We need all sectors of society to work together to ensure that services are available and accessible without discrimination to those who need them."

Quezon City has launched the #ZeroAt2030 campaign, which aims to reach the goal of zero new cases, zero HIV-related deaths and zero discrimination for PLHIV by 2030.