

POLICY BRIEF

SUPPORTING CROSS-BORDER TELEPSYCHIATRY SERVICES FOR OVERSEAS FILIPINOS

GREGORIO R. CANDELARIO JR., MPA
CRISTELA MAE C. CANDELARIO, RMT, MSMT
MA. ANGELICA C. PLATA, RN, MD
ISMAEL L. CORDERO, JR., MD, DPCAM
REAGAN JOSEPH T. VILLANUEVA, MD, DPCAM, MAHA



Department of Foreign Affairs

BACKGROUND

Foreign posts play a crucial role in Overseas Filipino welfare support, serving as the primary point of contact for distressed workers. Telepsychiatry can improve access to mental healthcare through timely diagnosis and intervention. However, stakeholder consultations conducted in November 2024 identified significant diplomatic and operational challenges in implementing cross-border telepsychiatry, including manpower concerns, host country regulations, and the need for standardized protocols across posts. This policy brief outlines evidence-based recommendations for the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) to support the implementation of cross-border telepsychiatry services. Based on: (1) Focus group discussions with key stakeholders, including DFA representatives; (2) Successful embassy-based implementation model in Kuwait; and (3) Analysis of international regulatory frameworks and diplomatic considerations.

EVIDENCE BASE

Research Findings from the Kuwait
Telepsychiatry Study(Candelario et al., 2024):

- Local Embassy Staff Support:
 - Successfully trained welfare officers to facilitate sessions
- Technical Infrastructure:
 - Secure video conferencing enabled private consultations
 - Maintained data privacy compliance
- Service Delivery:
 - High user satisfaction (4.77/5.00)
 - Catered to 55 female OFWs
 - 40% diagnosed with mental health conditions
 - Effective management of various mental health conditions



Stakeholder Engagement Meeting:

- This policy brief draws from findings of a stakeholder engagement meeting conducted on November 22, 2024.
- Using purposive sampling, key representatives from seven critical organizations were selected based on their direct or indirect involvement with migrant workers, policy-making, mental health, psychiatry, psychology, telemedicine, e-Health, or information and communications technology.
- Individuals from the academe and private sector were also invited for a well-rounded discussion.



Focus group discussions with relevant stakeholders.
Legend:
A – representatives from DMW-OWWA, DFA, DOST-PCHRD;
B – representatives from DOH, PHIC, DOST-PCHRD;
C – representatives from DICT, PPA, PAP, DOST-PCHRD, private sector;
D – representatives from PMHN, private sector and academe.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Department of Foreign Affairs stands at a critical juncture to transform mental health support for Overseas Filipinos. The successful implementation in Kuwait demonstrates the viability of embassy-based telepsychiatry services. DFA must act now to develop the diplomatic frameworks and post-level infrastructure needed to scale this vital service across our foreign missions. Our OFWs' mental health cannot wait – the time for diplomatic action is now!

1. Diplomatic Framework Development

- Include mental health services for overseas Filipinos in diplomatic discussions
- Negotiate implementation agreements
- Address cross-border data privacy concerns

2. Foreign Post Enhancement

- Establish telepsychiatry support units
- Develop technical infrastructure
- Create standard operating procedures

3. Inter-agency Coordination

- Strengthen Department of Migrant Workers and Department of Health collaborations
- Establish clear communication channels
- Develop joint crisis response protocols

RECOMMENDED IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS 6-12 months

- **Assessment of Host Country Regulations**
 - Identify regulatory barriers to implementation
 - Map existing mental health service frameworks
 - Include mental health awareness in activities
- **Guideline Development**
 - Create standard operating procedures for posts
- **Staff Capacity Building**
 - Train post personnel in telepsychiatry support
 - Conduct technical system orientation

MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS 12-24 months

- **Infrastructure Enhancement**
 - Set up dedicated telepsychiatry spaces in posts
 - Implement data management systems
- **Protocol Implementation**
 - Roll out operational procedures
 - Implement security protocols
- **Coordination Mechanisms**
 - Establish inter-agency communication channels
 - Create referral pathways with local healthcare

LONG-TERM ACTIONS

- **Diplomatic Framework**
 - Develop international partnerships
 - Create sustainability frameworks
- **Full Operational Capacity**
 - Scale services across all major posts
 - Establish continuous improvement processes
- **Program Review**
 - Conduct comprehensive impact assessments
 - Evaluate service effectiveness



For more information, contact: Gregorio R. Candelario, Jr. (gregjrcandelario2@gmail.com)