

[AS INTRODUCED IN THE SENATE]

**A
Bill**

to provide for mandatory opportunistic screening for hypertension and to strengthen health systems particularly at primary care to treat hypertension in Pakistan

Whereas it is necessary to provide for mandatory opportunistic screening for hypertension in Pakistan, to further the goal of early detection of hypertension, to allow timely treatment and management of risk factors, and ultimately to help reduce morbidity and mortality related to cardiovascular disease, which is the leading non-communicable disease in Pakistan and for the matters connected therewith and ancillary thereto;

It is hereby enacted as follows:-

1. Short title, extent and commencement.- (1) This Act may be called as the Pakistan Opportunistic Screening and Treatment of Hypertension Act, 2023.

(2) It shall extend to the Islamabad Capital Territory.

(3) It shall come into force at once.

2. Definitions.- In this Act, unless there is anything repugnant in the subject or context,-

(a) "Cardiovascular Disease" refers to a class of diseases that involve the heart and blood vessels, including but not limited to hypertension, coronary artery disease and stroke;

(b) "Government" means the Federal Government of Pakistan;

(c) "Healthcare System" includes all private and public medical facilities, clinics, hospitals and healthcare providers in Pakistan, including primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare facilities;

(d) "Hypertension" or "raised or high blood pressure" is a long-term non-communicable medical condition, where the blood pressure in the arteries is persistently elevated;

(e) "Ministry" means the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination in Pakistan;

- (f) "Monitoring Unit" refers to the designated body established within the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination for the purpose of overseeing the implementation and effectiveness of the opportunistic blood pressure screening program;
- (g) "Opportunistic Screening" refers to the process of conducting blood pressure measurements whenever citizens come into contact with the healthcare system, regardless of the primary reason for their visit; and
- (h) "WHO" means the World Health Organization Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.

3. Functions and powers of mandatory screening.- The objective and purposes of mandatory hypertension screening shall be to,-

- (a) reduce mortality and morbidity by early detection and early treatment of hypertension;
- (b) reduce the incidence of cardiovascular disease by identifying and treating its precursors;
- (c) reduce the severity of hypertension and cardiovascular disease by identifying people with the condition and offering effective treatment; and
- (d) increase choice by identifying conditions or risk factors at an early stage in a life course when more options are available.

4. Protocols for Mandatory Opportunistic Blood Pressure Screening and optimizing treatment of hypertension in primary care.-

(1) All adult citizens and residents of Pakistan, upon their contact with the healthcare system, shall undergo opportunistic blood pressure screening as a routine part of their healthcare experience.

(2) The screening shall be conducted by healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses or other authorized healthcare providers, in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Ministry.

(3) The screening process shall be non-intrusive, respecting the privacy and dignity of individuals and shall be conducted within a reasonable timeframe.

(4) The screening results shall be recorded in the individual's medical record for future reference and monitoring purposes.

(5) In case of detection of hypertension, patients shall be referred to appropriate services to manage the disease.

(6) The Ministry shall develop and disseminate comprehensive guidelines and protocols for healthcare providers to ensure standardized and effective opportunistic blood pressure screening, incorporating best practices, evidence-based approaches and international standards of care.

(7) The Ministry shall develop a technical package including simple evidence based treatment protocols for healthcare providers to ensure uniform standardized care of treatment of hypertension as recommended in WHO guidelines.

(8) The Ministry shall also ensure adequate supply of drugs as outlined in the protocol for the projected number of hypertensives per defined geographical area and will strengthen supply chain mechanisms and capacity to facilitate medicine availability.

(9) The Ministry shall ensure a team based, patient centric approach to care by outlining roles and responsibilities and cascading care to non-physician professionals as appropriate. Lady health workers shall also form part of this team as defined by scope of practice.

(10) The Ministry shall develop a longitudinal facility-based monitoring system that ensures patient outcomes.

5. Monitoring Unit at the Ministry.- (1) A Monitoring Unit shall be established within the Ministry to oversee the implementation and effectiveness of the mandatory opportunistic blood pressure screening protocols and treatment optimization.

(2) The Monitoring Unit shall consist of qualified medical professionals, experts in cardiovascular health and field formation.

(3) The Monitoring Unit shall be responsible for,-

- (i) developing guidelines and protocols for opportunistic blood pressure screening;

- (ii) evaluating the performance and quality of screening and treatment across healthcare facilities;
- (iii) monitoring the overall impact and effectiveness of the screening and treatment program;
- (iv) recommending improvements and necessary adjustments to the screening and treatment program; and
- (v) providing regular reports to the Ministry on progress including patient level data which indicates how the program is performing overall.

(4) A call center infrastructure shall be used to support implementation, by educating citizens about the importance of blood pressure screening and the benefits of early detection, answering queries related to the screening process, guidelines and getting feedback from patients who have undergone screening to assess screening of these protocols.

6. Public Awareness and Education.- (1) The Ministry, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, shall initiate public awareness campaigns to educate citizens about the risks associated with hypertension and cardiovascular disease and the importance of regular blood pressure screening.

(2) These campaigns shall emphasize the benefits of early detection, adherence to medications, prevention and lifestyle modifications in managing and reducing the burden of cardiovascular diseases.

(3) Efforts shall be made to promote healthy lifestyle choices, including regular physical activity, balanced nutrition and weight management, as integral components of preventing and managing hypertension and cardiovascular health.

7. Reporting and Evaluation.- The Ministry shall approve the annual report of the programme and cause such report to be laid before the National Assembly of Pakistan.

8. Funding and Resources.- (1) The Government shall allocate appropriate funds and resources to support the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the opportunistic blood pressure screening protocols and accompanying optimization of treatment, as well as initiatives targeting the prevention and management of hypertension.

(2) Public-Private partnerships and collaborations shall be encouraged to enhance the efficiency and reach of the screening mechanism, use of the simple treatment programs and adoption of standard indicators ensuring broader coverage and accessibility for all citizens.

9. Act not to prejudice other laws.- The provisions of this Act shall be in addition to and not in derogation of any other law for the time being in force.

10. Power to make rules.- The Government may make rules, not inconsistent with the provisions of the Act, for carrying out the purposes of this Act.

11. Removal of difficulties.- If any difficulty arises in giving effect to the provisions of this Act, the Government may make such order, not inconsistent with provisions of this Act or any other law regulating the implementing agencies, as is necessary or expedient to remove such difficulty.

STATEMENT OF OBJECTS AND REASONS

According to the WHO, 37.3% of the adult population in Pakistan suffers from hypertension, with only 30.2% being aware or having been diagnosed by the condition. A large proportion of the population with hypertension remains undiagnosed, untreated, or inadequately treated. Consequently, this causes a higher risk of subsequent complications, such as heart disease, stroke, and kidney failure, as well as disability and premature mortality. The prevalence of uncontrolled hypertension has increased in Pakistan and is expected to continue to rise. The WHO recommends through its latest guidelines improving and expanding identification and treatment (using evidence-based protocols) of people with hypertension, decentralizing care and tracking blood pressure control rates in clinical settings.

2. This Bill aims to make it mandatory for all healthcare facilities to conduct hypertension screening and improve treatment delivery for all adult patients who visit for any ailment, to diagnose the disease early and provide patients with the tools to manage it.

**SENATOR SANIA NISHTAR
MEMBER-IN-CHARGE**