

PARLIAMENT OF KENYA
THE SENATE
SENATE BILLS DIGEST
THE AUTISM MANAGEMENT BILL, 2025
(SENATE BILLS NO. 19 OF 2025)

Sponsor: Senator Karen Nyamu, M.P
Date of Publication: 26th September, 2025
Date of First Reading: 26th November, 2025
Committee referred to: Standing Committee on Health
Type of Bill: Ordinary Bill

1. PURPOSE OF THE BILL

The principal object of the Autism Management Bill, 2025, is to provide for an integrated and coordinated approach to the management of autism in Kenya. The Bill seeks to establish a comprehensive legal framework for early screening, diagnosis, management and support of persons with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), while promoting public awareness, research, and the allocation of adequate resources towards autism programs.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE BILL

What is Autism?

According to WHO Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) also referred to as Autism refers to a diverse group of conditions. They are characterized by some degree of difficulty with social interaction and communication. Other characteristics are atypical patterns of activities and behaviours, such as difficulty with transition from one activity to another, a focus on details and unusual reactions to sensations. The abilities and needs of autistic people vary and can evolve over time. While some people with autism can live independently, others have severe disabilities and require life-long care and support. Autism often has an impact on education and employment opportunities. In addition, the demands on families providing care and support can be significant. Societal attitudes and the level of support provided by local and national authorities are important factors determining the quality of life of people with autism.

What problem is sought to be addressed by the Bill?

According to the National Council for Persons with Disability Analytical Monograph on Autism (2024), approximately 75 million people worldwide have autism spectrum disorder, representing 1% of the global population. The WHO estimates that one out of 59 children are born with autism and related developmental disabilities, making this a significant public health concern that requires dedicated legislative attention. According to a report done by the Autism Society of Kenya in the year 2007, about one in every 25 children suffer from Autism. This accounts for about 4% of the general population in Kenya. Since there is no central data collection Centre for autism cases in Kenya however, the statistics are not quite accurate and therefore affecting the policy and budgetary issues towards autism in Kenya. The challenges surrounding management of Autism in Kenya include late diagnoses, a shortage of trained professionals, limited access to specialized education and therapeutic services, and inadequate data on autism prevalence. There is no comprehensive legal framework specifically addressing the needs of persons with autism, resulting in poor service delivery and insufficient coordination between national and county governments.

What does the law currently provide?

Currently, persons with autism are covered under the general provisions of the Persons Living with Disability Act, 2025 (Act No. 4 of 2025), which provides for the rights and protection of persons living with disabilities. However, this legislation does not provide specific provisions for the unique diagnostic, management and support needs of persons with autism spectrum disorder. The lack of autism-specific legislation has resulted in inadequate specialized services, poor diagnosis, and insufficient training for medical practitioners and caregivers dealing with autism.

Why the Bill

Kenya adopted the World Health Organization's 2014 global Autism Resolution titled "Comprehensive and Co-ordinated Efforts for the Management of Autism Spectrum Disorder," which was co-sponsored by 50 states and supported by all 194 WHO member countries. To give effect to this international commitment and address the gaps in domestic legislation, this Bill seeks to establish a comprehensive legal framework specifically for autism management.

The Bill is anchored in Article 43(1)(a) of the Constitution which guarantees every individual the right to the highest attainable standard of health.

3. OVERVIEW OF THE BILL

What does the Bill regulate?

The Bill provides for the comprehensive management of autism (ASD) in Kenya, covering early screening, diagnosis, treatment, support services, data collection, training, public awareness, and resource allocation at both national and county levels.

Responsibilities of the National Government

Clause 4 of the Bill mandates the National Government to –

- (a) develop, establish, coordinate and monitor the implementation of national standards and policies relating to autism;
- (b) formulate and monitor a National Autism Strategy that aligns with international best practices;
- (c) establish National Diagnostic Centers in all existing referral hospitals to ensure early detection and management of autism;
- (d) undertake capacity building through continuous training of medical practitioners and caregivers;
- (e) promote public awareness by undertaking continuous public education and sensitization campaigns to eradicate stigma and foster inclusivity;
- (f) promote research and innovation and establish linkages with international research agencies;
- (g) develop a framework to increase accessibility of affordable medical services for persons with autism;
- (h) in collaboration with county governments and non-state actors, develop a national database of persons with autism for planning purposes;
- (i) provide technical assistance and capacity building to county governments; and
- (j) ensure that education and information on autism prevention, treatment and management forms part of healthcare services.

The Bill further requires the Cabinet Secretary to set aside specific allocations from the national health budget to support autism prevention activities including early screening programs, diagnostic infrastructure, training, and public awareness campaigns.

Responsibilities of County Governments

Clause 5 of the Bill mandates county governments to –

- (a) implement national standards and policies relating to autism;
- (b) formulate and monitor a county autism strategy aligned with the national strategy;
- (c) establish County Diagnostic Centers in all existing county level 4 and 5 hospitals for early detection and management of autism;
- (d) establish community-level caregiver support groups;

- (e) establish a county database of persons with autism and share this information with the national government; and
- (f) put in place measures for accessibility of affordable medical services for persons with autism within county hospitals.

County governments are required to set aside specific allocations from county health budgets to support autism prevention and management activities.

Establishment of Autism Units

Clause 6 of the Bill mandates both the Cabinet Secretary and each county executive committee member to —

- (a) establish an autism unit within the ministry of health or the relevant county department dealing with public health matters; and
- (b) ensure diagnostic centers are staffed with trained professionals and appropriate diagnostic tools.

Autism units shall be responsible for —

- (a) collecting and collating data on autism prevalence at national and county levels;
- (b) establishing and updating national and county databases;
- (c) coordinating all autism programs including training and public awareness campaigns; and
- (d) performing other duties as directed by the Cabinet Secretary or county executive committee member.

County autism units are required to periodically share data with the National Government for updating the national database.

Education and public sensitization

The Bill requires the National Government and county governments, in collaboration with stakeholders, to —

- (a) promote public awareness about the causes, means of prevention, treatment and management of autism through comprehensive nationwide campaigns;
- (b) conduct education and information campaigns in schools, institutions of learning and communities throughout Kenya;
- (c) provide training, sensitization and awareness programs on autism to medical practitioners, community and social workers, educators, and other stakeholders;
- (d) ensure the involvement and participation of individuals and groups affected by autism in education and information programs; and

- (e) ensure that information provided covers support, attitudes towards affected persons, and psychological support for caregivers.

Teacher Training and Syllabus

Clause 8 of the Bill mandates the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development to –

- (a) ensure that autism awareness is integrated in both pre-service and in-service teacher training; and
- (b) develop a training curriculum to be integrated into syllabuses on the management of autism to ensure care of persons with autism is taught at all levels of education.

Complementarity with Existing Disability Legislation

The Bill provides that in addition to its specific provisions, persons with autism shall enjoy all the rights, protection and privileges provided for under the Persons Living with Disability Act, 2025, and other relevant laws

Regulations

The Bill empowers the Cabinet Secretary, in consultation with the Council of Governors, to make regulations for the better carrying out of the provisions of the Act.

4. CONSEQUENCES OF THE BILL

The Bill, once enacted, will establish a comprehensive legal and institutional framework for the management of autism in Kenya. It will ensure early detection and diagnosis of autism through the establishment of diagnostic centers at national and county levels. The Bill will facilitate access to affordable and quality diagnostic and management services for persons with autism, while ensuring adequate training for medical practitioners, teachers, and caregivers.

The Bill will promote public awareness and reduce stigma associated with autism, fostering a more inclusive society. It will establish robust data collection systems to inform policy development and planning. The Bill will also ensure dedicated budgetary allocations for autism programs at both national and county levels, guaranteeing sustainable support for persons with autism and their caregivers.

By aligning Kenya with international best practices and the WHO's global autism resolution, the Bill will position the country as a leader in autism management in the region while fulfilling constitutional obligations under Article 43(1)(a) regarding the right to health.

5. WAY FORWARD

What next?

The Bill was Read a First Time in the Senate on 26th November, 2025. Pursuant to standing order 145 of the Senate Standing Orders, the Senate Standing Committee on Health shall facilitate public participation and shall take into account the views and recommendations of the public when the committee submits its report to the Senate.

What is expected of members of the public

Members of the public are expected to present their views to the Senate Standing Committee on Health for consideration.

Note:

1. This Digest reflects the Bill as passed by the National Assembly and does not cover any subsequent amendments to the Bill made thereafter.
2. The Digest does not have any official legal status.