

Budget 2022 must fill gaps in healthcare system, govt told

By **Hakimie Amrie Hisamudin** - October 15, 2021 7:00 AM

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The government must ensure that the contributions of frontliners are fully appreciated, says former deputy health minister Dr Lee Boon Chye.

PETALING JAYA: Health experts have asked Putrajaya to provide enough budgetary support to fill gaps in the healthcare system that the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed.

They said the pandemic had laid bare several shortcomings, such as a shortage of manpower, a lack of attention to the importance of digitalisation, and the need for additional doses of Covid-19 vaccines and medication for non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

Former deputy health minister Dr Lee Boon Chye called for an appreciable increase in Budget 2022 allocation for the public healthcare system, saying a 20% hike was needed for Covid-19-related expenditures alone. These would include vaccine procurement and testing and operating expenditure.

He spoke of the importance of providing resources for a catch-up process in the treatment of NCDs, which had been delayed because of attention to Covid-19, and also resources for the treatment of mental ailments.



Dr Lee Boon Chye.

"Mental health problems have been increasing before and during the pandemic and this will continue after the pandemic," he told FMT.

Lee said the government should also look into digitalisation in the healthcare system.

"There is an urgent need to implement EMR (electronic medical records) to improve the overall efficiency of the health ministry," he said. "EMR will enable seamless patient care across different healthcare facilities.

"Additional resources are needed to implement virtual consultation. The ministry has started home quarantine monitoring for Covid-19 patients. The same can be done in following up on NCD patients."

He said public healthcare facilities were known to be understaffed and noted that their personnel were often overworked.

"We are fortunate to have truly dedicated frontline healthcare workers who have worked tirelessly for the past 22 months," he said.

"The government must ensure the contributions of these healthcare workers are fully appreciated and that the health ministry is adequately staffed, especially with nurses, doctors and specialists."

Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Dr Koh Kar Chai said the country's healthcare was underfunded by global standards.

He noted that the healthcare budget had been below 4% of the country's GDP since 2006.

"A minimum 5% of GDP in healthcare spending is among several criteria that need to be met towards achieving Universal Health Coverage by year 2030," he said.

Koh also said the distribution of healthcare services in the country had been disproportionate and he urged the government to remedy this.



Dr Koh Kar Chai.

"Funds need to be invested in new infrastructure and the upgrading of existing infrastructure to match the population demand," he said.

He called for an increase in the allocation for Skim Peduli Kesihatan for the B40 income group (Peka B40).

"We hope the government will continue to enhance its Peka B40 health programme for the lower income group. More households are expected to drop to the B40 group due to the economic impact of the pandemic," he said.

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