

# Medical Fraternity Hails Dzulkefly's Return As Health Minister, Expected To 'Hit The Ground Running'

By CodeBlue | 12 December 2023

MMA, HDK, MedTweetMY, and the Galen Centre welcome Dr Dzul's return as Health Minister, ahead of great challenges. Galen Centre urges Dr Dzul to shepherd the anti-smoking bill through until it becomes law. "Dzulkefly will need to hit the ground running."



Health Minister Dzulkefly Ahmad. Photo posted on the Ministry of Health's Facebook page on August 27, 2019.

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 12 – The medical fraternity warmly received the return of Dzulkefly Ahmad as Malaysia's 24th health minister today, ahead of significant challenges and expectations in a declining public health service.

Galen Centre for Health and Social Policy chief executive Azrul Mohd Khalib said the appointment of Dzulkefly, popularly known as Dr Dzul, in a Cabinet reshuffle showed Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's recognition of the need for experience, expertise and prioritisation to address the many significant short- and long-term challenges in the health portfolio.

"Dzulkefly will need to hit the ground running, and will face a steep learning curve. There will be less patience, very little sympathy, and cynicism among many stakeholders," Azrul said in a statement.

"The Health Minister must act to rebuild confidence, build alliances, and regain trust. The health challenges that Malaysia faces have grown increasingly larger, and in some situations worsened over the past year."

Under Dzulkefly's predecessor Dr Zaliha Mustafa, the government dropped the generational end game (GEG) ban on tobacco and vape products for anyone born from 2007 from the Control of Smoking Products for Public Health Bill 2023 that is currently pending at the Dewan Negara, after passage in the Dewan Rakyat last November 30.

The Galen Centre recommended, in Dzulkefly's first 100 days of office, for the new health minister to shepherd the Control of Smoking Products for Public Health Bill through the Senate, royal assent, and gazettelement into the statute books until it finally becomes law.

"Nothing should be taken for granted. Anything could happen to stall the progress of the bill. Somehow, this past year has seen the government becoming labelled as being pro-tobacco and pro-vape industry, with many compromises and eroding of Malaysia's obligations under the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). The incoming Minister needs to immediately act to repair the damage to Malaysia's reputation," Azrul emphasised.

The Galen Centre also urged Dzulkefly to consider four critical issues: finding a solution to sustainable health care financing, respond effectively to the crisis of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), close the gap on mental health, and address the lack of preparedness to provide care for Malaysia's ageing population.

"The previous Minister faced the same issues and they have not seen any improvement in the past year," Azrul said.

The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) eagerly welcomed Dzulkefly's appointment and the opportunity to work closely with him again.

"With his proven track record, experience and strong leadership qualities, we believe he is well-equipped to address the complex issues and challenges within the health care system," MMA president Dr Azizan Abdul Aziz said in a statement.

"MMA had a good working relationship with Datuk Seri Dzulkefly. He was willing to listen to the views of experts and held regular engagements with stakeholders on any policy decisions. He was also willing to make unpopular decisions when needed, (like the smoking ban at eateries), to protect public health."

Dzulkefly – who was previously health minister in Dr Mahathir Mohamad's Cabinet from 2018 to 2020 – replaced Dr Zaliha after about one year of the junior MP's office as health minister. During Dr Zaliha's tenure, she removed liquid nicotine from the Poisons List

despite unanimous opposition from the Poisons Board, [triggering an historic lawsuit](#) from anti-tobacco groups against the health minister.

In today's Cabinet reshuffle, Dr Zaliha, Sekijang MP from Johor, was transferred to be appointed Minister in the Prime Minister's Department in charge of the Federal Territories. Anwar did not announce a deputy for her.

Hartal Doktor Kontrak (HDK), an informal group representing contract doctors, congratulated Dzulkefly's appointment as health minister.

"We at Hartal Doktor Kontrak hope that the health reform process and the welfare of all Ministry of Health staff will be the crux of Dzulkefly's administration. We are also open to be consulted to provide our views and constructive criticism to strengthen health care delivery for all our beloved Malaysian citizens," [HDK posted on Facebook](#), describing Dzulkefly as "Our YBMK".

MMA Schomos honorary secretary Dr Sean Thum [said on X](#): "We'll need Dr Dzul to do a lot. There is much to do."

Family medicine specialist Dr Syazana Ali expressed hope for better services in primary care with multiple key performance indicators (KPIs), portfolios, and adequate staff. "We stand by you and continue to serve the people," she [posted on X](#).

MedTweetMY, an online group of medical practitioners on X, similarly congratulated Dzulkefly's appointment. "Welcome back, YBMK!" MedTweetMY founder and chairman Dr Khairul Hafidz Al Khair [posted on X](#).

"12 months of decent recess or hiatus of sort. Ready to bounce back," Dzulkefly [replied](#).

Paediatric infectious disease specialist Dr Sangeetha Siniah [posted on X](#) that Dzulkefly's appointment was the "best news to end the year".

Dr Kelvin Yii, a special advisor to Dr Zaliha when she was health minister, told Dzulkefly: "All the best in your new role helming this important Ministry as we work together to future-proof and safeguard our health care system for generations to come."