

More Public Health Care Facilities Needed, But Prevention Must Be The Focus

By Alifah Zainuddin | 19 November 2024

MMA says there will always be a need to expand health care facilities, while urging stronger emphasis on health education to curb NCDs. Kota Melaka MP Khoo Poay Tiong says elected reps should make their constituencies more liveable for healthier living.



Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Kalwinder Singh Khaira speaks at the Industry Leadership Summit 2024 in Kuala Lumpur on October 10, 2024, organised by the Galen Centre for Health and Social Policy and supported by PMCare Sdn Bhd. Photo by Saw Siow Feng.

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 19 — The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) is calling for a two-pronged approach to address excessive demand on the public health care system, urging both an expansion of facilities and a stronger focus on preventive care.

MMA president Dr Kalwinder Singh Khaira acknowledged that while expanding infrastructure is necessary, it cannot be the only solution.

“Both are equally important, but attention has to be given to the preventive aspect of health care,” Dr Kalwinder told *CodeBlue* in a statement.

“Not only through strengthening services at the *klinik kesihatan* levels, but also by empowering patients to take care of themselves by encouraging a healthy lifestyle and imparting knowledge.

“The need for more health care facilities to improve services will always be there, but there should be a stronger emphasis on health education,” he added.

Dr Kalwinder’s remarks follow comments by Ministry of Health’s (MOH) deputy secretary-general (finance) Norazman Ayob, [who recently warned that the public health care system is nearing capacity](#), with 80 per cent of hospitals already exceeding 100 per cent bed occupancy rates.

Norazman attributed this to the growing burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and the country’s ageing population, while highlighting the need for public-private partnerships (PPPs) rather than simply building more hospitals.

Dr Kalwinder noted that over 70 per cent of Malaysians – approximately 22.4 million people – rely on public health care, leading to overcrowding and high admission rates for both inpatient and outpatient services.

“The responsibility to care for these patients falls on public health care workers who are overwhelmed by the high patient load and heavy workloads, which often require them to put in extra hours,” Dr Kalwinder said.

To ease this burden, the MMA calls for the MOH to leverage the network of private general practitioners (GPs) across the country. Dr Kalwinder believes the government could do more to integrate private GPs into its prevention strategy.

Dr Kalwinder also called on politicians to play a greater role in promoting healthy lifestyles among their constituents. Health awareness programmes at the community level are crucial to improving health outcomes, he said.

“Educating the public is key. Awareness on the importance of diet control, regular medical check-ups, compliance with treatment and follow-ups, as well as knowledge about NCDs and their complications, should be emphasised not only by health care workers but also through mass media and social media channels across all segments of society,” Dr Kalwinder said.

Kota Melaka MP: Invest In Health Care, Promote Liveable Spaces

Kota Melaka MP Khoo Poay Tiong said the growing demand for health care, especially due to the rise in NCDs, is undeniable.

“It is the government’s responsibility to invest in infrastructure and human resources in health care to meet this demand and ensure proper education (awareness) and screening (prevention) are available so people can take better care of their health,” Khoo told *CodeBlue*.

In addition to expanding health care services, Khoo agreed that legislators should consider the liveability of their constituencies, including the availability of parks and walkways that promote healthy living.

“Walkability is important. Especially in the UNESCO World Heritage Site (in Melaka), we’ve taken steps to ensure it’s walkable. The Melaka riverside, not only a tourist spot, is also a good walking area. I always have my morning jogging session here,” Khoo said.

He also pointed to policies on healthy eating that could be implemented at the local level.

“Yes, as policymakers, we must address the social aspect of food. To shift social norms, we need to frame healthy eating as an act of self-care and social responsibility. Individuals must take personal responsibility for their health by making informed dietary choices and adopting healthier lifestyles,” said the DAP lawmaker.