

Doctors back designated smoking areas, but say plan must prioritise public health than smokers



Health Minister Datuk Seri Dzulkefly Ahmad (centre) sticks a 'No Smoking' sign at a restaurant in Jalan Alor February 17, 2024. — Picture by Hari Anggara

By Muhammad Yusry

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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 21 — The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) has declared its support for the Health Ministry's proposal to introduce designated areas for smokers near food premises that are located close to each other.

However, the president of the umbrella group for medical professionals, Dr Azizan Abdul Aziz said the Designated Smoking Areas (DSAs) must be carefully planned and executed to put public health first rather than that of smokers.

“Considering the implementation of DSAs is by no means a U-turn in policy by the Health Ministry. We believe the ministry remains firm in its stand against smoking.

“We agree, if properly executed, DSAs have the potential to contribute to the gradual denormalisation of smoking — a viewpoint the MMA shares with the National Cancer Society of Malaysia,” she said in a statement.

Dr Azizan said the ministry needs to closely work together with local authorities and premise owners in identifying suitable locations for DSAs.

“Public health must remain the highest priority in these decisions, not the convenience of shop owners and smokers.

“DSAs should be situated outdoors and away from crowded areas to prevent exposure of non-smokers to secondhand smoke,” she said.

She also recommended that the ministry examine the implementation of DSAs in countries such as Singapore and Japan to gather insights and best practices.

On Saturday, Health Minister Datuk Seri Dzulkefly Ahmad said his ministry is considering the introduction of DSA for smokers near food premises that are located close to each other such as Jalan Alor, Kuala Lumpur.

He added that these dedicated spaces would consider the needs of both smokers and non-smokers.

Dzulkefly said the initiative is not a step backwards but a proactive measure to ensure a harmonious environment for everyone in the area.

He also said that the proposal is not final and his ministry remains open to receiving views and suggestions from the public, including input gathered through the recent engagement session with premises owners and traders.