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# Budget 2022: Stakeholders call for 4pc of GDP to be allocated to public healthcare system

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Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Dr Koh Kar Chai noted that since 2006, the country's healthcare budget has been below four per cent of the GDP. — Picture by Miera Zulyana

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KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 21 — Stakeholders in the health sector have expressed hope that the government will allocate at least four per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to the public healthcare system in Budget 2022.

Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Dr Koh Kar Chai noted that since 2006, the country's healthcare budget has been below four per cent of the GDP.

"The government had only spent approximately 2.2 per cent of GDP on public healthcare annually, therefore we are way below the healthcare budget recommended for a robust healthcare system," told Bernama here today.

Dr Koh said following advances in medical technology, ageing population, diseases, and increasing healthcare demand, healthcare costs in Malaysia were likely to outpace the national inflation rate.

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Dr Koh said the association also supports the implementation of heavier sin taxes for cigarettes and other substances and harmful ingredients like vape pods and sugar.

“We hope that the government will continue to enhance its Peka B40 programme for the lower-income group. We also hope the government will look into the disproportionate distribution of healthcare services in an effort to make healthcare more accessible throughout the country,” he said.

In addition, he said the government should look into the formation of an independent healthcare commission towards the much-needed healthcare reforms.

On the same note, the Malaysian Health Coalition, in a statement, said the commitment to increase the allocation to four per cent will put Malaysia closer to other upper-middle-income countries that are spending an average of 3.8 per cent of GDP on their public healthcare system alone.

The coalition of 29 health-related organisations and 10 health professionals, opined that the increase must be accompanied by adequate procurement oversight to eliminate corruption and inefficiencies.

“The additional funds will allow us to transition from 'short-term campaigns' for Covid-19 into 'long-term routines' of vaccinations, surge healthcare, and public health surveillance,” it said.

The coalition said Budget 2022 must also spend aggressively to improve staffing and morale of all health personnel in the public service and address non-health determinants.

“Specifically, we recommend two non-health areas for investment to improve health outcomes. Firstly, improving indoor ventilation in Malaysia by investing in new building codes, incentives for retrofitting buildings, and measures to improve indoor air quality such as tax credits for CO2 monitors or mechanical ventilation.

“Secondly, we recommend strengthening the social welfare net through a basket of solutions, including providing direct or conditional cash transfers, harmonizing the currently fragmented landscape of welfare programs, and eradicating poverty in multi-dimensional terms,” the statement read.

Meanwhile, Malaysian Public Health Physicians' Association president Datuk Dr Zainal Ariffin Omar said the government needs to give focus on improving access to health facilities other than hospitals, such as health and rural clinics.

“Among the aspects that needed attention are the staff, equipment and public health education on noncommunicable diseases (NCD) such as obesity, diabetes and others,” he said.

Dr Zainal said the Covid-19 pandemic also showed that there were still many shortcomings in the country's health facilities that need to be rectified.

“This includes the aspects of digitalisation in public healthcare facilities that need to be improved to enable more time to be spent on improving patient care,” he said.

Apart from that, he said the government should also continue organising programmes for medical officers, nurses and human resources

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Budget 2022 is expected to be tabled at Parliament by Finance Minister Datuk Seri Tengku Zafrul Abdul Aziz on October 29. — Bernama

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