

Address tobacco addiction among Malaysians first, say doctors' group

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PETALING JAYA: A doctors' group says comprehensive measures to deal with tobacco addiction are needed before the generational end game (GEG) anti-smoking Bill is put into effect.

Federation of Private Medical Practitioners' Associations Malaysia (FPMPAM) said nations such as Australia and New Zealand have long-established processes – such as tobacco harm reduction programmes – to deal with tobacco addiction, which was why similar laws established in their respective countries were effective.

FPMPAM president Dr Steven Chow said Malaysia had yet to embark on such programmes and the Bill also did not take into account scientific data on its effectiveness.

"We agree with the goal, but pressing ahead without preparatory work would be a dangerous social experiment.

"Like all addictions, smoking is amenable to proper medical intervention and treatment – not by criminalising the addict," he said in a statement on Monday (Aug 1).

Dr Chow said legislators should first consider sustainable and policy-driven programmes based on tobacco harm reduction and look at making intervention the focus of its smoking and vaping cessation policy.

However, the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) said the Health Ministry should go ahead with the Bill as protecting the health of Malaysians was the right thing to do.

MMA president Dr Koh Kar Chai said the nation would make economic gains by saving people from the financial burden of diseases associated with smoking and vaping.

"To all the MPs – don't let the majority down. We believe after going through two years of the pandemic, most Malaysians would agree that attaining and maintaining good health is of vital importance," said Dr Koh in a statement on Monday.

Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin tabled the Tobacco and Smoking Control Bill in Dewan Rakyat, which seeks to prohibit the sale of cigarettes, tobacco and vape products to anyone born after 2007.