

# 'Concrete healthcare plan needed'



By [Tharanya Arumugam](#) - February 27, 2022 @ 9:00am



A Comprehensive and sustainable plan that addresses public healthcare must be developed to improve efficiency and tackle present and future challenges such as workforce shortages. - NSTP file pic

KUALA LUMPUR: A Comprehensive and sustainable plan that addresses public healthcare must be developed to improve efficiency and tackle present and future challenges such as workforce shortages.

Malaysian Public Health Physicians Association vice-president Professor Dr Jamalludin Ab Rahman said defects or gaps in the public healthcare services, if not duly addressed, could lead to a crisis.

He said this when commenting on the shortage of nurses, which Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin said had been reported across government hospitals and clinics.

"The root of the problem is the lack of attention and planning for the sustainability of healthcare in the country.

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"This human resources issue is similar to the issue of contract doctors. It is not about supply, but the availability of posts.

"This (manpower shortage in the public healthcare system) does not stop at nurses," he told the *New Sunday Times*.

Dr Jamalludin said the authorities must study the need for nurses, medical assistants, environmental health officers or health inspectors, as well as other allied healthcare workers.

More importantly, he said, the government must have a long-term preparedness and response plan.

He said the coronavirus crisis would not be the last pandemic to pose socio-economic and health threats to the country and the world. Besides, he said, the prevalence of non-communicable diseases was also a cause for concern, which could burden the healthcare system further.

Therefore, he said, it was imperative for Malaysia to have a concrete long-term plan that would prevent public health services from collapsing in the event of a crisis.

Jamalludin said the Health Ministry should get input from experts on the ground in drafting the plan.



From left: Professor Dr Jamalludin Ab Rahman and Dr Koh Kar Chai

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"A comprehensive and sustainable plan must be developed. Ideas and advice from experts, as well as from the community, are needed."

Khairy had, on Feb 25, also said the ministry had been instructed to conduct a detailed analysis and study on the nursing shortage in the public healthcare sector.

He said in the long run, the government should look into public health expenditure, which he believed was suffering from chronic underinvestment.

The ministry, Khairy said, would submit a White Paper in Parliament outlining transformations for the healthcare system.

Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Koh Kar Chai said the shortage of nurses needed to be addressed together with the increasing healthcare needs of the population.

This, he said, should be based on realistic projections for positions and budgets based on trends of patients seeking care at both government and private healthcare facilities.

"Nurses are the backbone of a healthcare system. In hospitals, they spend more time with the patients than doctors and play a key role in monitoring the health of patients under their care," he told the *New Sunday Times*.

Dr Koh also said in a very short time, which could be as early as 2030, Malaysia would become an ageing nation, with 15 per cent of the population aged 60 and above.

The healthcare system then, he said, could expect a surge in demand for nurses and other allied healthcare professionals, particularly those specialising in geriatric care.

"It can be difficult to forecast, but it is vital to start engaging the experts on what would be a likely scenario in the years to come."