

# LETTER | MMA looks forward to tabling of White Paper on healthcare reforms

Dr Koh Kar Chai

Published: Mar 20, 2022 10:19 AM · Updated: 10:19 AM

**LETTER** | The Malaysian Medical Association is happy to note that Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin is in agreement with the association that the White Paper on Healthcare Reforms needs to be tabled as soon as possible and we do hope that he is able to get it tabled in Parliament by November this year.

MMA has repeatedly called for a reform to be looked at, years before the pandemic hit us. We knew that even though our healthcare system had received accolades for its accessibility, there is much that needs to be done before our populace truly receives healthcare that is not only accessible and equitable but also affordable to all.

Financial allocation is always a point of contention as it means a diversion of funds from elsewhere. We stand firm to the attestation that a healthy nation will progress and achieve its goals of a highly developed nation.

The White Paper will need to touch on many issues plaguing the healthcare system of our nation. Whilst it has to be a comprehensive document, there are some pertinent areas to look at.

1

A†

f

🕒

🐦

The nation has been so preoccupied these past two years with infectious diseases mainly on Covid-19 and its variants. It is to be noted that many of the victims are those who are elderly as well as those with comorbidities.

It is time that we come out with policies for the management of the elderly as our nation will soon reach ageing nation status. Our seniors cannot be made to fend for themselves, and the government needs to have enough foresight to work on geriatric issues to avoid them being a huge burden on the healthcare system.

We need to work now on policies that support and promote healthy ageing so that spending on treating illnesses among older persons can be reduced.

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have taken a back seat these past two years and we need to resume our attention to bring NCDs under control. A nation with a low incidence of NCDs will be a much healthier country with resilience to future pandemics. Policies in screening for NCDs should be formulated, not only for the B40s but the whole population.

Rare diseases should not be forgotten. These diseases are not so rare now with advancements in diagnostic tools. Though treatment and ways to manage such diseases may be available, it remains expensive and out of the reach of most.

There has to be a concerted effort to boost our own research facilities to allow for homegrown treatment modalities which will bring the cost down to an affordable level.

Similarly with cancers. As a nation ages, so will the incidence of cancer rise. Policies on affordable screening for everyone, similar to programmes to encourage screening for NCDs will ensure that we detect cancer in its early stages.

Treatment cost will rise tremendously for each advancing stage of cancer with most not being able to afford treatment at a tertiary stage and sadly opting to live out their final days in the deadly throes of an advanced cancer.

Having a healthy nation will mean everyone needing to adopt a healthy lifestyle. We should look into incentives and programs to allow the populace the means and avenues that encourage and support a healthy lifestyle.

Not to be forgotten is the healthcare workforce. If the healthcare workers themselves are not taken care of, all our plans will come to nought. We need to put in place a conducive working environment and ensure proper human resource planning to ensure that the health personnel are able to give their very best in the maintenance of a good healthcare system.

This White Paper will need a bipartisan approach. Healthcare must never be politicised. Do not gamble away the health of our nation.

MMA hopes that the Health minister will continue to engage with the association as he moves forward with the drawing up

of the White Paper.

As a final note, a social health financing scheme has been suggested before and even attempted. Will anyone dare to take up the challenge once again?

---

DR KOH KAR CHAI is MMA president.