

MMA eager to help draft white paper on healthcare reforms



Dr Koh Kar Chai

KUCHING (March 18): The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) hopes Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin will engage the association in drawing up the white paper on healthcare reforms for the planned tabling in the Dewan Rakyat in November.

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MMA president Dr Koh Kar Chai in a statement yesterday said the white paper will need to touch on many issues plaguing the country's healthcare system.

"Whilst it has to be a comprehensive document, there are some pertinent areas to look at.

“The nation has been so preoccupied these past two years on 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 timely that we come out with policies for the management of the elderly as our nation will soon reach ageing nation status,” he said.

He said senior citizens cannot be made to fend for themselves and the government needs to have enough foresight to work on geriatric issues to avoid it 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.”

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During the Minister’s Question Time in the Dewan Rakyat on Tuesday, Khairy said the white paper is aimed at strengthening the country’s health system holistically so that the services are more equitable, of higher quality, easier to access at reasonable cost and sustainable in the long run.

According to Dr Koh, MMA has repeatedly called for reforms, years before the pandemic hit the country.

“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.

However, he said financial allocation has always been 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,” he said.

He also said non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have taken a back seat these past two years and there is a need to resume the attention to bring NCDs under control.

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At the same time, there must be a concerted effort to boost research facilities to allow for home-grown treatment modalities which will bring the cost down to an affordable level, he added.

“A nation with 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 advancement in diagnostic tools. Though treatment and ways to manage such diseases may be available, it remains expensive and out of the reach of most.

“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.”

Meanwhile, Dr Koh said the white paper on healthcare reforms will need a bipartisan approach.

“Healthcare must never be politicised. Do not gamble away the health of our nation.”