

MMA slams ‘decades of neglect’ of Sabah health services

The medical association backs Sabah chief minister Hajiji Noor’s recent appeal for higher federal budget allocations.

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The Duchess of Kent hospital in Sandakan. Sabah’s chief minister, Hajiji Noor says, many of Sabah’s hospitals and clinics are dilapidated. (Bernama pic)

PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian Medical Association has backed Sabah chief minister Hajiji Noor’s appeal for more funds for health services in Sabah, saying the state has long been neglected.

MMA president Dr Muruga Raj Rajathurai said infrastructure in Sabah was “very much in need of an upgrade”.



Dr Muruga Raj Rajathurai.

He said there were frequent cases of machine breakdowns, and problems of insufficient or obsolete medical equipment and consumables, and long waiting times for repairs and maintenance.

“They are almost daily occurrences in the state,” he told FMT. “Decades of neglect by Putrajaya have allowed this situation to worsen.”

Hajiji has previously said that most of Sabah’s hospitals and clinics are in dilapidated condition.

In response, health minister Dr Zaliha Mustafa said health allocations were based on detailed studies on the needs of each state, and it was the responsibility of each state government to ensure allocations were used optimally to meet the needs of the people.

Muruga said there was a lack of specialist facilities and that because there were no PET scan machines available in Sabah, patients had to travel to Putrajaya for treatment. PET scan machines are used to detect diseases in the body.

“Maldistribution of healthcare services and a lack of facilities on Sabah’s east coast are also issues. Patients need to travel all the way to Kota Kinabalu to get MRI scans, as there are none on the east coast,” he said.

He also said Sabah is home to a high number of undocumented migrants, resulting in the greater use of medical resources.



Frankie Poon.

Former Sabah health minister Frankie Poon agreed that many hospitals and clinics in the state needed to be upgraded. “Because we have 24 hospitals to maintain, we need more (allocations) than other states.”

Poon said many Sabahans in need of specialised treatment often had to wait, sometimes for months at a time to be treated because not all specialists were stationed there permanently.

He also said many Sabahans had to drive for hours to access health services in other areas if they were not available nearby. “We only have one general hospital in Sandakan so if you are in Lahad Datu, it will take you about two-and-a-half hours to get there.”