

Promote Awareness Towards Healthy Lifestyle

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PETALING JAYA: Education about a healthy lifestyle will help fight and reduce the growing number of non-communicable diseases (NCD) cases in the country, especially in three categories – cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular disease (CVD).

Former deputy health minister, Lee Boon Chye, said while vaccines have helped reduce most infectious diseases, NCD are growing and becoming a significant healthcare threat.

“The public must be educated about the importance of a healthy lifestyle, and fight obesity by following a healthy diet. There is also the need to catch NCD at an early stage to prevent it from taking hold.

“Free medical check-ups for the B40 group will help the Health Ministry keep track of NCD among those from the lower income.

The network of government clinics nationwide can play an important role in combating NCD, by advising the most vulnerable.”

Lee, who is Gopeng MP, said the ministry needs to go all out to promote a healthy lifestyle through the ministry’s Health Education Division.

“People should be encouraged to exercise, such as taking 10,000 steps a day. Parents and primary school children need to learn how a healthy lifestyle can help prevent NCD.”

Lee said educating children from young about healthy living will save the ministry money in the long term as fewer people will fall victim to NCD.

The total direct healthcare costs of the three NCD categories were estimated at RM9.65 billion in 2017. The total healthcare cost for diabetes was RM4.38 billion; followed by CVD, with RM3.93 billion; and cancer, RM1.34 billion. Hospitalisation costs for the three categories totalled RM1.58 billion.

With these estimated costs, coupled with the loss of productivity costs of RM12.88 billion, the combined cost burden was RM22.53 billion to the Malaysian economy. This is equivalent to 1.56% of Malaysia’s 2017 gross domestic product.

Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Koh Kar Chai said prevention is the best way to reduce the costs of treatment for NCD. Awareness of the impact of one’s lifestyle on health and policies that support a healthy lifestyle is necessary.

“The public should see their family doctor for a medical check-up at least once a year to check their health status. This simple habit of managing health will show that better outcomes can be achieved by being proactive.

"Healthy lifestyle habits should be adopted while a person is still healthy. Many only start thinking of their health when they have an issue. We need to move towards becoming more prevention-centric."

He said the problem of obesity in Malaysia is worrying as it can lead to many other serious issues such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and certain cancers.

"Obese individuals must know that lifestyle changes are important to manage this condition. Awareness is also important or they may not see it as a problem. We know the main contributor to obesity is poor eating habits."

Koh said it does not help that eateries in our country are mushrooming, but with certain lifestyle adjustments, people's health conditions can improve.

He advised those wanting to join any weight loss programme to first seek medical advice.