

We Support White Paper's Holistic Approach To Reform Health Care System – MMA

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By shifting most health care services from tertiary and secondary care over to primary care, health care spending can be utilised more effectively.

The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) has been advocating for a review of the current health care system in Malaysia since the 1980s, when we recognised that the system may be ageing.

But there was no urgency and also no political will to do something about it, as health care services were still adequate, albeit with some shortcomings here and there.

There was also international praise for this health care system of ours, which led many to believe that if the system ain't broke, why the need to fix it.

However, fast forward to now, as we are endeavouring to come out of the Covid-19 pandemic, we realised that we can't wait anymore. The pandemic has made the gaps in our health care system more evident, and MMA is again making the call for a reform of the current health care system.

We are supporting the health minister in his efforts to draw up a Health White Paper to be tabled in Parliament as a way forward to achieve the changes needed to have health care delivery that is seamless and accessible to all, at an affordable cost and quality that would be the envy of many other countries.

This is indeed a courageous call by the minister, and one that should be supported by the people. MMA calls upon all MPs from both sides of the divide to back this call for the future of our nation.

It is hoped that regardless of the outcome in the coming general elections, there will be commitment from the government of the day to follow through on the much needed reforms in our health care system.

Health care should not be the responsibility of the Health Ministry, alone but all ministries. If we look at the other ministries, we will find that there will be a component of health care within them, a component which has the ability to cripple them, if not attended to.

However, the logical way to go is to have a Health care Commission that is being proposed as part of the reforms. With other ministries and agencies having control and a say in how the health care service is funded and managed will hamper the effectiveness of the system.

Health care involves everyone, but the system needs a certain level of autonomy to allow it to adapt to continuing change so that it has the ability to face challenges that are thrown its way.

Increase To 5 Per Cent In National Health Budget Essential To Carry Out Reforms

A proposal to increase the health care budget from 2.85 per cent of the GDP to 5 per cent is essential, if we are sincere about reforms. The 5 per cent is the bare minimum needed as we move forward in the exercise to expand health care services, as well as to improve the system.

The shift from sick care to health care and wellness will need a realistic level of funding to make it work. Otherwise, all efforts will fall flat even before it begins.

Primary Care Is Key To Sustainable Health Care Delivery

The Health White Paper will touch on every aspect of an individual's life. However, one cannot escape the fact that primary health care is a cornerstone that cannot be ignored and must be strengthened if we are to embark on meaningful reforms.

Primary care is the first line of defence in the health care system. With emphasis on this area of health care, health can be monitored

to prevent diseases or certain conditions progressing to a chronic stage.

Primary care practitioners play an important role in prevention, which will ultimately help save on high costs for treatments. While the Health Ministry has plans to enhance primary care, it will also need to embark on campaigns to educate the public on the role of primary care in our health care system.

It has been shown that by shifting most health care services from tertiary and secondary care over to primary care, health care spending can be utilised more effectively, and ultimately lead to overall reduced spending.

It will allow preventive care to be prioritised, and this is where the focus will be instead of just spending on curative care.

Ultimately, we must be reminded that reforms need a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach to make it work.

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