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Proposed National Health Fund Mustn't Burden Malaysians: MMA

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MMA says a proposed National Health Fund mustn't shift the financial burden of health care onto the public, adding that clarity is needed on whether the fund will support workforce needs like staffing, remuneration, and retention, beyond funding services.



Dr Sivanaesan Letchumanan, president of the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA).

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 17 — A National Health Fund (DKN) cannot substitute adequate government investment in public health care or shift the financial burden onto the public, said the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA).

The doctors' group said any new health care financing mechanism must also safeguard affordability and equitable access, without placing an undue financial burden on Malaysians.

"Greater clarity is also needed on whether the proposed National Health Fund will support health care workforce needs, including staffing, remuneration, and retention," said MMA president Dr Sivanaesan Letchumanan in a statement today.

"Sustainable health care financing must go beyond funding treatment and services. It must also ensure that our public health care facilities have sufficient health care professionals to meet growing demand.

Without adequate investment in the workforce, improvements in patient care will be difficult to achieve.

"There must also be transparency and accountability in how the fund is governed, with clear safeguards to ensure that resources are used efficiently and equitably."

Health Minister Dzulkefly Ahmad announced in the Dewan Rakyat yesterday that the Ministry of Health (MOH) was working on establishing a DKN, a "hybrid" health financing model with federal-state involvement and a "package of benefits".

However, he said a potential National Health Fund Bill might only be introduced by a new government in 2029, rather than by the current Madani administration, whose term ends in a year when Parliament automatically dissolves in December 2027.

The minister provided scant details about the proposed DKN. MOH wrote on its Facebook page yesterday that the DKN was aimed at reducing the ministry's reliance on annual allocations from the federal consolidated fund.

Although health is on the concurrent list of the Federal Constitution, state governments do not fund MOH health care facilities or emoluments of health care workers in the federal civil service. Certain health-related matters, like public health and sanitation, have shared responsibilities between the federal and state governments.

Sabah Deputy Chief Minister II Masidi Manjun previously told *CodeBlue* that health worker remuneration or staff accommodation for placements fell under the federal government's financial and constitutional responsibility, rather than the state government.

"MMA hopes that the government will engage health care professionals and other stakeholders early in developing the framework to ensure that the proposed reforms address the realities and needs of our health care system," said Dr Sivanaesan.

"While we recognise the complexities involved and the 2029 timeline, pressing challenges such as hospital overcrowding, workforce shortages and the retention of health care professionals cannot wait."