

MMA urges swift action on Sabah, Sarawak healthcare shortages, welcomes proposals

By Ahmad Mukhsein Mukhtar

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Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim speaking to Malaysian Medical Association president Dr L. Sivanaesan (centre) and the association's representatives recently. - Courtesy pic

KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian Medical Association has urged swift action to address critical healthcare manpower shortages in Sabah and Sarawak, welcoming proposals by Senator Dr R.A. Lingeshwaran to strengthen the workforce in both states.

MMA president Dr L. Sivanaesan said many of the measures were consistent with

solutions MMA had previously mooted, but these must now be backed by funding and a firm implementation timeline.

"The solutions are already on the table. What is needed now is the political will, adequate funding and a firm implementation timeline.

"Hospitals operating with only a handful of medical officers cannot afford to wait for another committee, another review or another announcement that the matter is being looked into," he told the New Straits Times.

Dr Sivanaesan warned that every delay adds burden on remaining personnel and risks further weakening healthcare delivery in both states.

"The time for studying the problem is over. Sabah and Sarawak need decisive action now, not more promises," he said.

He said MMA had raised the concerns directly with the Health Ministry's top leadership and urged Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, in his capacity as finance minister, to ensure sufficient funding in the 2027 Budget to address the shortages.

MMA had also called on the Sabah and Sarawak governments to consider supplementary incentives for healthcare personnel, including special allowances, housing and other support.

"Resolving this crisis will require a concerted effort by both the Federal and state governments."

Dr Sivanaesan said the government must take a comprehensive approach, as short-term fixes or isolated incentives would not be enough.

Beyond financial incentives, healthcare workers needed manageable workloads, fair on-call arrangements, protected rest, access to leave, safe and suitable accommodation, and clear pathways for transfers, postgraduate training and career progression.

He said the measures must extend beyond doctors to include other healthcare professionals.

Earlier, Lingeshwaran had proposed 11 immediate measures to make postings in Sabah and Sarawak fairer, more attractive and sustainable, including a standard 24-month service period after which doctors with satisfactory performance could apply for transfers, specialist training or their next placement.

The Parliamentary Special Select Committee on Health has also called for a review of existing allowances and incentives, with committee member Young Syefura Othman saying some hospitals were operating with as few as three medical officers.