



Ensuring we grow old with grace

THE GOOD NEWS: Malaysians are living longer.

The bad news: We're mostly living those extra years in ill health.

That is the grim picture painted by the 2025 National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS), which was released last Monday.

The last time the NHMS focused on older people was in 2018; this is the second round of senior-focused information gathering.

The good news: Our older folk are dealing with depression better, with the number going from 11.2% in 2018 to 8% now; more seniors are also doing better with less physical dependency in daily living.

The bad news: In seven years the number of people suffering from dementia has risen from 8.5% to 10%.

Other negative findings include the fact that 18.8% of seniors – that works out to nearly one in five of the 4.1 million older people in the country – live alone compared with 6.3% in 2018. That's a huge leap.

This report is an alarm bell. To respond, we must jump in with both feet and address current and future issues.

To begin with, we need to fast track the Senior Citizens' Bill because the country is ageing now – not some time in the future, but now.

This Bill proposes to protect the rights and welfare of Malaysia's elderly by establishing legal safeguards against abuse and neglect, while mandating the development of age-friendly infrastructure and specialised healthcare to support dignified ageing. It will

hopefully be tabled in Parliament this year.

The second thing is to make sure future senior citizens are healthier.

According to the NHMS 2025, currently only 14.7% of older Malaysians are ageing well. The majority are living with multimorbidity – the presence of two or more chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol.

Many of our elderly are thus spending their twilight years in clinics and hospitals rather than within their communities. This burden is not just a personal tragedy; it is an economic weight our healthcare system cannot sustain.

As Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad has cautioned, we cannot start addressing ageing issues only when indi-

viduals reach their 60s. The poor health of today's seniors is often the result of poor lifestyle choices made decades earlier.

So to truly change our trajectory, we must address the other end of the age spectrum and raise awareness of healthy living among the young, starting with children.

Our education system must move beyond textbooks to prioritise nutritious meals in school canteens and active play over sedentary screen time.

If we do not teach our children the value of a balanced diet and exercise now, we are simply preparing the next generation for premature frailty.

Malaysia is already an ageing nation; we must ensure that growing old remains a grace, not a burden on family, caregivers and the economy.

Recipe to cut out health risks

Push targets excessive salt, sugar intake fuelling NCDs

By ARFA YUNUS
arfayunus@thestar.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR: Three in four Malaysian adults are consuming excessive amounts of salt, averaging 7.3g daily, far above the World Health Organisation's recommended limit of less than 5g, says Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad.

This trend is fuelling a wider non-communicable disease (NCD) crisis, he said.

"This situation is not merely a personal health issue. It is a ticking time bomb," he said in his speech when launching the "Mai Kurang Gula, Garam dan Kalori" initiative's recipe book here yesterday.

He said the alarming dietary

pattern reflects broader health challenges, with one in six adults living with diabetes and one in three suffering from hypertension.

Poor eating habits remain a key contributor to the worsening situation, pointing to excessive sugar and salt intake among Malaysians, he said.

"Some 47% of adults consume sugar beyond the recommended level of more than 7.5 teaspoons per day, largely driven by sweetened beverages."

Citing the latest findings from the National Health and Morbidity Survey, Dzulkefly said more than half a million adults in the country are living with at least four major NCDs simultaneously, underscoring the severity of the issue.



Chef at work: Dzulkefly (centre) helping Chef Ahmad Arif (right) cook a dish after the launch of the 'Mai Kurang Gula, Garam dan Kalori' recipe book. — ART CHEN/The Star

He stressed that the implications go far beyond individual health, warning of significant economic consequences.

Dzulkefly said that NCDs cost Malaysia an estimated RM64.2bil annually, with direct healthcare expenses amounting to RM12.4bil, while indirect costs – including premature deaths, absenteeism and reduced productivity – total RM51.8bil.

"The true burden of NCDs is far greater and more critical than what we see in hospitals or clinics," he added.

Against this backdrop, the *Mai Kurang* recipe book is being posi-

tioned as a practical step towards improving dietary habits nationwide.

Describing it as a "vibrant blueprint for healthier living", Dzulkefly said the first edition features 30 recipes aimed primarily at promoting healthier eating practices in workplaces.

"This recipe book is first and foremost for the workplace because that's where we want to promote healthy eating habits."

He added that the initiative would be expanded to include up to five editions comprising 150 recipes, with new releases planned every three months.

"We are planning to share this with all vendors – food courts, restaurants, cafe operators.

"So far, we have 130 vendors who have expressed interest in carrying these recipes."

Dzulkefly said the recipe book would be made available free of charge and can also be accessed online via the National Cancer Society Malaysia's website, with recipes to be shared daily on social media.

All recipes had been reviewed by nutritionists and dietitians to ensure they are practical and aligned with healthier eating standards, he said.

Sleep: Therapy for your brain

OUR mental well-being is also linked to the quality of our sleep, says psychiatrist Dr Petra Beschoner.

"Sleep is like a daily therapy session for the brain," says the medical director of a psychotherapy clinic in Germany.

If we miss out on overnight recovery, our emotional balance can quickly be thrown off, she adds.

Emotional strains would then become increasingly difficult to offset, she says.

This can have consequences particularly in the long term: Anyone who sleeps too little or has restless nights over a longer period will react more sensitively to stress and develop depressive or anxious symptoms more

often, according to Dr Beschoner.

Learning and performance also suffer with persistently poor sleep.

So, what can we do to sleep better?

Healthy sleep cannot be forced, but it can be encouraged.

What can help, Dr Beschoner says, is:

- > Give the brain enough time to wind down before going to bed.
- > See the night as a protected phase of recovery.
- > Keep regular bedtimes and wake-up times.
- > Sleep in a darkened bedroom.
- > Consciously avoid screens and bright light in the last hours before sleep.
- > If you tend to brood, write

down worries or tasks before going to bed.

> If problems persist long term, seek professional support.

In some circumstances, sleeping pills can also provide relief, but they should only be used temporarily and under medical supervision.

Worried that you might have a sleep disorder?

The occasional bad nights spent lying awake because your mind will not stop racing don't necessarily mean you have a sleep disorder.

A sleep disorder in the medical sense is only when problems falling asleep or staying asleep occur at least three times a week over a period of more than three weeks and noticeably impair



Sleep isn't just rest; it's the brain's nightly therapy session, and skipping it can quietly derail mood, learning and stress tolerance. – dpa

daytime well-being, Dr Beschoner says.

A developing sleep deficit can show up in everyday life like this:

> You can hardly get out of bed in the morning despite enough time in bed.

> At midday, you struggle with lapses in concentration.

> In the evening, you already feel anxious about the next restless night.

> You brood as you fall asleep or wake up at night with a racing pulse. – dpa

NEW research suggests that spending a lot of time on "mentally passive" activities like watching TV or smartphone screens may increase the risk of developing dementia.

In contrast, activities that keep the brain active, such as solving crossword puzzles, may help protect against it.

During the study, the researchers followed participants for about eight years to see who developed Alzheimer's disease or mild cognitive impairment, a condition that often occurs before dementia.

The participants also answered questions about how mentally active they were at different stages of life.

In childhood, this included things like being read to, reading books, having access to newspapers or atlases, and learning a foreign language.

In middle age, activities included having a library card, subscribing to magazines and visiting libraries or museums.

In later life, it involved reading, writing, playing games and having sources of income like pensions or Social Security.

Based on this information, the researchers gave each person a score that reflected how mentally active they had been throughout their life.

They found that people with higher scores were much less likely to develop Alzheimer's disease or mild cognitive impairment, compared to those with lower scores.

The study also showed that people who stayed mentally active developed symptoms later in life.

On average, those with higher scores were diagnosed with Alzheimer's at age 94, while those with lower scores were diagnosed around age 88.

Mild cognitive impairment also appeared about seven years later in the more mentally active group.

"Our findings suggest that cognitive health in later life is strongly influenced by lifelong exposure to intellectually stimulating environments," said study author and Rush University Medical Center neuropsychologist Assist Prof Dr Andrea Zammit.

The study's findings were published in *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology, in February. – dpa

Engage the brain, lower dementia risk



Mentally passive activities like swiping through social media and watching shows are junk food for the brain. To lower your risk of dementia, you need to actively use it with challenging activities, research suggests. – dpa

Experts push for wider use of advanced liver cancer therapy



Aileen Yap

reporters@theborneopost.com

KUCHING: Late-stage diagnosis of liver cancer continues to limit treatment options in Sarawak, prompting calls from medical experts for greater awareness and wider access to advanced therapies.

To strengthen local capability, SIRT_eX on Friday night conducted a session involving 25 Sarawak General Hospital (SGH) doctors from various disciplines, including nuclear medicine, surgery, physicians and interventional radiology, focusing on the latest developments in Selective Internal Radiation Therapy (SIRT) and its clinical application.

The session featured Kuching-born oncology expert Prof Dr Pierce KH Chow, senior consultant surgeon at the National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS), who presented findings demonstrating that higher, targeted doses of Yttrium-90 (Y-90) used in SIRT could drastically improve tumour response in patients with locally advanced hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC), the most common primary liver cancer.

“When we analysed different dose levels, we found clear differences in outcomes. Higher doses led to better responses without added toxicity,” said Dr Chow.

He noted that while traditional practice aimed for a minimum radiation dose of around 120 Gy (a unit of absorbed radiation), the optimal level had remained unclear.

Citing data from 2019 to



Dr Chow (standing, second left) joins the participants for a group photo, taken after the session.

2024, he said patients receiving higher doses showed markedly improved outcomes.

“Tumours treated with more than 200 Gy achieved complete response, while doses above 120 Gy resulted in disease control in all cases.”

He added that extending follow-up imaging to nine months helped capture delayed responses, particularly in lower-dose cases.

“Median survival among advanced liver cancer patients in the study reached about 44 months,” he said.

Dr Chow also highlighted SIRT’s ability to downstage tumours, potentially making previously inoperable cases suitable for surgery.

He said outcomes also compared favourably with conventional treatments such as transarterial chemoembolisation

(TACE), particularly in delaying disease progression.

However, translating such advances into local practice remained a key challenge.

SGH consultant interventional radiologist Dr Dhayal Balakrishnan said efforts were underway to integrate SIRT into Sarawak’s treatment pathway through closer multidisciplinary collaboration.

“We want all teams to work together – clinicians to refer, nuclear medicine to plan the dose, and surgeons to assess whether the patient is fit for surgery,” he told The Borneo Post when met after the session.

He added that many patients in Sarawak presented at advanced stages with large tumours, limiting treatment options.

“If we could treat them earlier, we could move from palliative care to potentially curative

surgery,” he said, noting links between liver cancer cases and high rates of cirrhosis and hepatitis in East Malaysia.

He also said TACE remained widely used due to lower cost, albeit being largely palliative.

Dr Dhayal stressed that awareness remained a gap, as some patients were unaware that advanced treatments like SIRT were already available locally.

“Cost remains a major barrier, with each SIRT treatment estimated at about RM50,000.

“With funding support, especially from the state, we can treat more patients and offer this as a first-line option,” he said.

Both specialists emphasised that improved outcomes would depend on stronger multidisciplinary collaboration, earlier detection, and better access to advanced liver cancer therapies.

41 kes penyakit berkaitan cuaca panas direkod setakat ini

Majoriti kelesuan haba, lima negeri catat cuaca panas

KUALA LUMPUR - Sebanyak 41 kes penyakit berkaitan cuaca panas direkodkan setakat ini, dengan majoriti melibatkan kes kelesuan haba, kata Menteri Kesihatan, Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad.

Beliau berkata, daripada jumlah itu, 35 kes melibatkan kelesuan haba, diikuti tiga kes strok haba akibat aktiviti fizikal, dua kes strok haba dalam ruang tertutup, manakala satu kes kekejangan haba.

"Bagaimanapun, setakat Jumaat, tiada kes baharu berkaitan cuaca panas dilaporkan," katanya kepada pemberita selepas merasmikan Majlis Pelancaran Buku Resipi "Mai Kurang" dan program Rewang Bersama Komuniti di Memorial Tun Abdul Razak, di sini pada Sabtu.

Sementara itu, Dr Dzulkefly berkata, setakat jam 6 pagi Sabtu, sebanyak lima negeri merekodkan cuaca panas Tahap 1 atau kategori berjaga-jaga, melibatkan Perlis, Kedah (Kubang Pasu, Pokok Sena, Pendang, Padang Terap dan



DR DZULKEFLY

Sik), Kelantan (Jeli, Tanah Merah, Pasir Mas dan Kuala Krai), Perak (Kuala Kangsar dan Hulu Perak) serta Jerantut di Pahang.

Selain itu, beliau berkata, daerah Machang di Kelantan merekodkan cuaca panas Tahap 2 atau gelombang haba.

Dalam pada itu, Dr Dzulkefly menyokong kenyataan Perdana Menteri, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, yang mempertimbangkan untuk mengehendkan pergerakan Jemaah Menteri serta Kementerian susulan krisis bekalan global.

Beliau berkata, langkah itu selaras dengan pendekatan Kerajaan Madani yang menekankan tatakelola kewangan berhemat, khususnya dalam menghadapi cabaran semasa.

"Langkah segera perlu dipertimbangkan bagi memastikan Malaysia tidak berdepan situasi catuan tenaga seperti yang berlaku di beberapa negara lain," katanya.

Pada Jumaat, Anwar berkata, kerajaan sedang memperhalusi langkah lebih drastik bagi mengurangkan penggunaan tenaga susulan krisis bekalan global, termasuk mempertimbangkan untuk mengehendkan pergerakan Jemaah Menteri serta Kementerian. - *Bernama*

Penduduk empat negeri diingatkan lebih waspada

Kesan cuaca panas boleh jejas kesihatan, rancang aktiviti elak dehidrasi

Oleh Nuratikah Athilya Hassan dan Nur Fatihah Omar Baki
bhnews@bh.com.my

Kuala Lumpur: Orang ramai di Kelantan, Terengganu, Perak dan Kedah diingatkan supaya lebih berwaspada terhadap kesan cuaca panas yang boleh menjejaskan kesihatan, termasuk risiko strok haba.

Pakar Perubatan Kesihatan Awam, Datuk Dr Zainal Ariffin Omar, berkata suhu tinggi boleh menyebabkan dehidrasi, keletihan haba dan dalam keadaan serius, strok haba yang berpotensi membawa maut.

Menurutnya, dehidrasi teruk juga boleh menjejaskan fungsi buah pinggang serta mencetuskan sawan pitam jika tidak dirawat segera.

"Orang ramai perlu peka dengan tanda awal strok haba seperti sakit kepala berdenyut, pening, keletihan melampau dan kulit menjadi panas serta kering tanpa peluh.

"Gejala lain termasuk mual atau muntah, degupan jantung laju serta perubahan tingkah laku seperti keliru," katanya kepada BH.

Dr Zainal berkata, pengambilan air kosong yang mencukupi adalah langkah paling berkesan bagi mengelakkan dehidrasi.

"Minum sekurang-kurangnya dua hingga tiga liter air sehari dan lebih kerap jika berada di luar. Jangan tunggu sehingga haus kerana ia tanda awal dehidrasi.

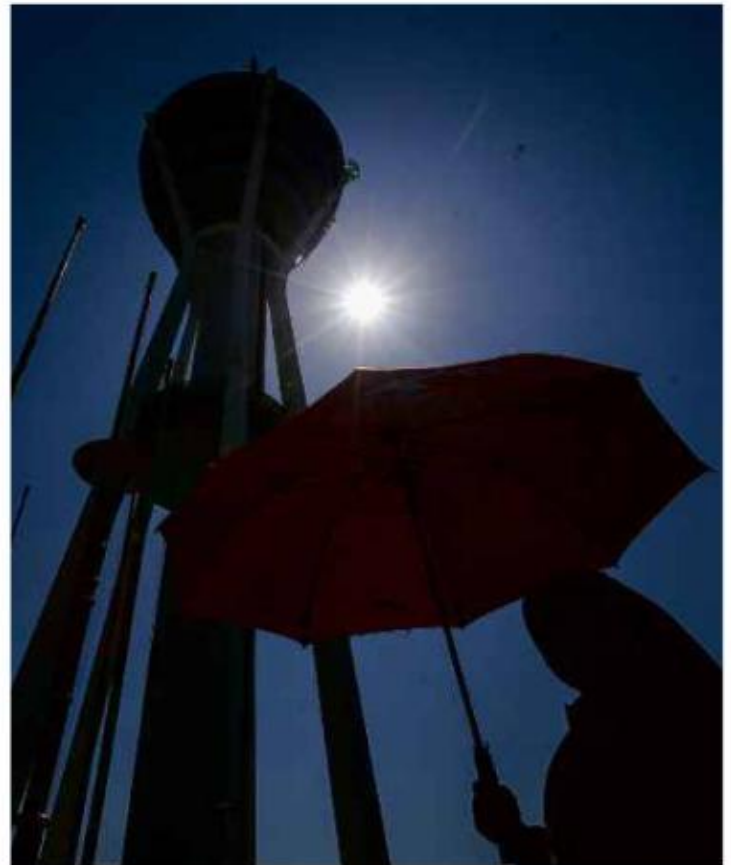
"Pada masa sama, perhatian lebih perlu diberikan kepada golongan berisiko tinggi seperti warga emas, kanak-kanak dan bayi, ibu mengandung, pekerja luar serta pesakit kronik seperti jantung, kencing manis dan darah tinggi," katanya.

Dalam pada itu, beliau menasihatkan orang ramai merancang aktiviti luar sebelum jam 10 pagi atau selepas jam 5 petang, manakala tempoh antara jam 11 pagi hingga 4 petang perlu dielakkan kerana ia adalah puncak haba.

Tambahnya, aktiviti berat pula perlu dihadkan kepada 15 hingga 20 minit bagi setiap sesi.

Kenal pasti gejala awal

Sementara itu, Pakar Perubatan Kesihatan Awam, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Prof Madya Dr Halimatus Sakdiah Minhat, berkata orang ramai perlu



Suhu tinggi boleh menyebabkan dehidrasi, keletihan haba dan dalam keadaan serius, strok haba yang berpotensi membawa maut. (Foto hiasan)

mengenal pasti gejala awal dan bertindak segera bagi mengelakkan komplikasi.

"Individu yang mengalami simptom seperti pening, loya, degupan jantung pantas atau peluh berhenti perlu dipindahkan ke tempat lebih sejuk, melonggarkan

pakaian dan menyejukkan badan menggunakan kain basah.

"Di rumah, penggunaan kipas atau penghawa dingin, mandi air suhu bilik serta menutup langsir pada waktu puncak dapat membantu mengurangkan haba," katanya.

MALAYSIA BERDEPAN KRISIS KESIHATAN

500,000 HIDAP 4 PENYAKIT

Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia berdepan krisis kesihatan awam yang membimbangkan apabila penyakit tidak berjangkit (NCD) seperti diabetes, hipertensi, obesiti dan penyakit jantung terus menjadi ancaman utama kesihatan rakyat.

Menteri Kesihatan Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad berkata berdasarkan Tin-

jauan Kebangsaan Kesihatan dan Morbiditi (NHMS), lebih setengah juta orang dewasa di negara ini menghidap sekurang-kurangnya empat NCD utama secara serentak.

Beliau berkata statistik turut menunjukkan satu daripada enam orang dewasa menghidap diabetes manakala satu daripada tiga mengalami tekanan darah tinggi.

"Situasi ini bukan seka-

dar isu kesihatan peribadi, tetapi turut memberikan kesan besar kepada ekonomi negara yang dianggarkan menanggung kerugian RM64.2 bilion setiap tahun akibat NCD," katanya ketika berucap pada Majlis Pelancaran Buku Resipi 'Mai Kurang' dan Program Rewang Bersama Komuniti di Memorial Tun Abdul Razak di sini semalam.

Dzulkefly berkata antara punca utama peningkatan

NCD ialah tabiat pemakanan rakyat yang masih tidak sihat termasuk pengambilan gula dan garam berlebihan.

"Data NHMS 2024 menunjukkan 47 peratus orang dewasa mengambil gula melebihi saranan, manakala tiga daripada empat orang dewasa mengambil garam berlebihan," katanya.

Beliau berkata keadaan itu memerlukan pendeka-

tan lebih menyeluruh bagi mengubah tingkah laku kesihatan rakyat, bukan sekadar kempen kesedaran.

Beliau berkata Kementerian Kesihatan (KKM) kini memberikan tumpuan kepada pendekatan *choice architecture* bagi menggalakan pilihan makanan lebih sihat.

Dalam pada itu, beliau berkata pelancaran Buku Resipi 'Mai Kurang' adalah antara intervensi penting

bagi menyokong usaha berkenaan.

"Buku ini merupakan instrumen intervensi yang memudahkan rakyat menyediakan hidangan sihat, rendah gula, garam dan kalori dengan cara mudah serta menepati cita rasa tempatan," katanya.

Dzulkefly berkata usaha menangani NCD memerlukan peralihan daripada pendekatan rawatan penyakit kepada pencegahan.