



**PRESS STATEMENT
MINISTER OF HEALTH MALAYSIA**

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS IN MALAYSIA

Worldwide, mental disorders affect more than 450 million people. Mental, neurological and substance use disorders accounted for 13% of the total global burden of disease. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates 1 in 4 people are affected by mental disorder at some point in their lives. Depression alone accounts for 4.3% of the global burden of disease and is among the largest single cause of disability worldwide.

The National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) conducted by the Ministry of Health (MOH) in 2015 revealed that the prevalence of mental health problems among those 16 years and above is 29.2%. 1 in 3 Malaysians have mental health issues, with highest prevalence among those aged 16-19 years as well as those from low income families.

Mental health problems can be seen among individuals throughout all milestones in life. Among the possible factors that may contribute to this more than two-folds rise over the past 10 years (10.6% in 1996; 11.2% in 2006) are financial difficulties, unemployment, work-related stress, family issues for example marital discord, poor parenting and other environmental factors. Having all these with poor coping skills and poor social support can further worsen one's mental health. Despite the availability of effective treatment, a person with mental health disorders may not seek help due to various factors like social stigma or other reasons related to their belief.

The MOH is very much aware and concerned with these worrying findings. Several preventive strategies and activities are already in place, including mental health promotion campaigns, mental health screening and intervention in primary care setting, community empowerment programmes which include stress management as well as providing psychological first aid in humanitarian emergencies. MOH also collaborates with Ministry of Education to implement the Healthy Mind Programme in secondary schools throughout Malaysia. In terms of providing treatment and rehabilitation for those diagnosed with mental disorders, there are 48 Ministry of Health hospitals and 4 mental institutions providing psychiatric services, and 671 health clinics as well as 20 Community Mental Health Centres of to cater for the community with mental health problems.

Ministry of Health realises that these strategies needs to be further enhanced especially in the area of intersectoral collaboration. We will **engage key strategic partners** such as youth, parents, caregivers (of the mentally ill) and teachers including school counsellors to help address mental health issues and fight stigma. Other important areas to look into would include community empowerment by training and providing skills to individuals outside of the health sector to advocate and deliver psychosocial mental health support and intervention. Surely the MOH will need the support from other agencies to ensure the implementation of the strategies.

At present, a technical working group comprising experts in mental health from MOH, other government and non-governmental agencies, agencies as well as NGO's are working on developing a National Strategic Mental Health Action Plan addressing mental health for the next 5 years (2016-2020). The action areas include:

- Accessible and comprehensive mental health care and services coverage
- Cross sector Collaboration with Related Agencies
- Mental Health Promotion within communities, schools and workplace to ensure mental health well being and to improve Mental Health Literacy
- Human Resource Development
- Mental Health in Humanitarian Emergencies: Psychological First Aid in Crisis
- Mental Health Research and Surveillance

The Ministry would like to urge family members and the carers of those with mental health problems or disorders as well as the community to play an important role in ensuring patients or those having early symptoms of depression and mental disorders to be brought early to health facilities for early detection and intervention. Family members need to reach out and help by taking the first step to lend an ear to their close ones with early depressive symptoms. We urge the community to be more alert especially if any family members or peers are detected to show symptoms of being emotionally troubled or signs of depression or other mental health problems. Upon detecting the signs, support and help must be offered and individuals affected need to be brought forward to seek help from health authorities or relevant organizations.

Media also needs to play a role to help provide accurate mental health facts and information to the public to be able to pick up or identify early signs of mental disorders, how to help, where to get help and also to reduce stigma. We need to address and reduce the stigma of mental illness, as stigma is the major barrier in individuals coming forward to get help. Everyone should play their role in promoting mental health.

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