

Towards a more resilient healthcare system

By **TEH ATHIRA YUSOF**
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KUALA LUMPUR: The government is committed to strengthening the country's healthcare system by addressing medical inflation and issues involving contract doctors and healthcare workers, says Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof.

The Deputy Prime Minister said this is among six key challenges the government will continue to address to enhance the healthcare system.

“Our strategic direction is focused on strengthening system resilience through bold innovation and meaningful collaboration. Together, we can build a healthcare system that is agile, future-ready and capable of meeting tomorrow's challenges,” he said in his keynote speech during the launch of the Malaysia International Healthcare (MIH) Megatrends 2025 event at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre yesterday.

Fadillah, who is also Energy Transition and Water Transformation Minister, said the government will also reinforce the Malaysian Healthy Agenda as the main framework for raising awareness and promoting healthy lifestyle practices among the public.

He said the government is committed to ensuring that every individual has access to basic and quality healthcare services, regardless of background or



Medical innovation: Fadillah (second from right) and Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad (centre) being briefed by KPJ Healthcare Berhad president and managing director Chin Keat Chyuan after the MIH Megatrends 2025 launch at KLCC. — LOW BOON TAT/The Star

socioeconomic status.

Following the Budget 2026 announcement by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim last month, the health sector remains one of the government's key priorities.

“A total of RM46.5bil has been allocated to the Health Ministry under Budget 2026, an increase from RM45.3bil this year.

“This reflects the government's strong commitment to strengthening the country's healthcare

system and ensuring fair, accessible and affordable healthcare services for all Malaysians,” he said.

MIH Megatrends 2025, organised by the Health Ministry returns for the second time with the theme “Innovating for a Healthier Sustainable Future.”

The event features conferences divided into three key areas – non-communicable diseases, public health and sustainability.

The conference sessions are led by distinguished speakers from

Malaysia and abroad, who are sharing insights and experiences on building a more resilient and inclusive healthcare system.

The three-day event, organised in a strategic collaboration with KPJ Healthcare, sees the participation of more than 1,500 individuals comprising healthcare professionals, policymakers and industry leaders from around the world to exchange ideas and explore developments in the sector.

Dzulkefly: No flood disease outbreaks reported yet

By TEH ATHIRA YUSOF

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KUALA LUMPUR: Two cases of acute gastroenteritis have been recorded at temporary evacuation centres (PPS), the Health Minister revealed.

Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said a total of 629 victims were examined at PPS across the country following flooding.

Of the victims treated, he said there were 78 cases of acute respiratory infections (ARI), 16 cases of skin infections, two cases of acute gastroenteritis (AGE) and one of conjunctivitis.

"No victim was referred to hospital, and no disease outbreaks were reported among the flood victims at the PPS as yet," he told reporters at the Malaysia International Healthcare (MIH) Megatrends 2025 event yesterday.

Dzulkefly said the ministry had also deployed emergency medical teams.

This included the Rapid Assessment Team (RAT), Rapid Response Team (RRT), Medical Emergency Response Team (MERT) and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS).

"These teams will carry out health assessments, provide treatment at PPS, conduct disease surveillance, perform environmental inspections and deliver psychosocial support to victims," he added.

Dzulkefly said a total of 48 emergency medical teams, comprising 16 RATs and 32 RRTs, have been deployed to the various PPS to provide medical services.

The Kelantan Crisis Preparedness and Response Centre (CPRC) flood operations room was activated on Sunday, while the CPRC operations rooms in Perak and Kedah were activated on Monday.

The state health departments in Terengganu, Perlis, Penang and Selangor have not activated their CPRC flood operation rooms.

Dzulkefly said the ministry has activated a comprehensive plan to provide medical assistance to flood victims.

Health Ministry activates plan to support, treat evacuees

■ BY QIRANA NABILLA MOHD RASHIDI AND FAIZ RUZMAN
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KUALA LUMPUR: The Health Ministry has raised the alarm on risks of leptospirosis, influenza and other diseases as floodwaters recede.

Its minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said as of Monday, 629 flood victims had been examined at temporary evacuation centres.

He added that Crisis Preparedness and Response Centre data showed 78 cases of acute respiratory infection, 16 skin infections, two acute gastroenteritis cases and one conjunctivitis case among evacuees.

"No evacuees required hospital referral and no outbreaks have been reported," he said after officiating at the Malaysia International Healthcare Megatrends event.

He also said the ministry had anticipated worsening flood conditions and activated a full preparedness plan to ensure uninterrupted healthcare services.

"Alternative health facilities have been identified should primary facilities be disrupted, while state health departments have updated assets, vehicles and medical supplies.

"Medicine stocks are sufficient for at least three months, with extra reserves available from concession suppliers."

Dzulkefly said he visited his Kuala Selangor constituency yesterday, where 954 residents from 231 families were affected by flood and are sheltering at Sekolah Kebangsaan Desa Aman, while another 22 evacuees from three families were placed at the Balai Raya Kampung Jaya Setia evacuation centre.

He added that the ministry is rolling out several key measures under its action plan to ensure health facilities remain safe and fully operational with sufficient manpower, equipment and logistics.

"Specialised medical teams are on



Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Fadillah Yusof and Dzulkefly visiting an exhibition during the event at Plenary Hall, Level 1, Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre. — ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THESUN

standby, including the Rapid Assessment Team, Rapid Response Team (RRT) and Medical Emergency Response Team, supported by mental health and psychosocial support units.

"These teams conduct health assessments, provide treatment at the relief centres and monitor for diseases. Environmental inspections and psychosocial support are also part of their duties."

He said inspections at the evacuation centres are ongoing, with all identified locations checked and assessed for suitability, while public health activities are being carried out with other agencies.

"While no new outbreaks have been reported, we remain cautious due to rising (cases of) influenza and other illnesses.

"We also remind the public to stay alert to diseases such as leptospirosis, especially as floodwaters recede."

Forty eight emergency medical teams, comprising 16 medical RRTs and 32 health RRTs, have been

mobilised to provide medical services and disease prevention for individuals affected by the floods.

The Meteorological Department issued a Continuous Rainfall Warning at Danger Level (Red) on Monday at 2pm for Kedah (Langkawi, Kubang Pasu, Kota Setar, Pokok Sena, Padang Terap, Yan, Pendang and Sik), Kelantan (Tumpat, Pasir Mas, Kota Bharu, Bachok, Machang and Pasir Puteh) and Terengganu (Besut), effective until today.

A Continuous Rainfall Warning at Alert Level (Orange) was also issued on Monday for Kedah, Penang, Perak, Kelantan and Terengganu until today.

As of 10.30am yesterday, 20,146 flood victims sought refuge at 119 relief centres across eight states, according to reports from the Social Welfare Department's InfoBencana, the Irrigation and Drainage Department's InfoBanjir and state disaster management secretariats.

Kelantan recorded 9,959 evacuees from 3,643 families across 40 relief

centres, followed by Selangor with 2,697 evacuees in 19 centres and Perak with 2,678 evacuees across 29 centres.

Perlis reported 2,694 evacuees, while Kedah had 1,632 evacuees in 12 centres, with four rivers above danger levels.

Penang reported 366 evacuees, Terengganu reported 97 evacuees at one centre and Pahang 23 evacuees after opening a relief centre in Raub. InfoBanjir reported several critical river readings, including Sungai Golok in Rantau Panjang rising to 8.55m, exceeding the danger mark by 0.55m.

In Pahang, Sungai Kuala Mendang in Lipis remained above the danger level at 85.35m, while Sungai Telemong in Bentong showed a downward trend at 98.19m, still above its alert threshold.

Sungai Bidor in Changkat Jong, Perak reached 4.59m, far above its normal level of around 2m, and Sungai Slim in Slim River stood at 27.82m compared with its normal 23.50m.

THERE is no clear link between pregnant women taking the common painkiller paracetamol and autism in their children, despite repeated claims otherwise by United States President Donald Trump, according to the most comprehensive review of the existing evidence published recently.

In September, the US president sparked outrage among the medical community by claiming that paracetamol, also known as acetaminophen, was associated with higher rates of autism.

Trump urged pregnant women to "tough it out" rather than take paracetamol, comments which health

No link between paracetamol and autism, major review finds

researchers warned could scare women off their safest option to treat pain and risked further stigmatising autistic people.

The World Health Organisation has emphasised that there is no robust evidence showing that paracetamol — which is the main ingredient in massively popular painkillers — causes autism.



Experts maintain that the recent increase in autism rates is due to improved, broadened diagnosis methods, along with growing awareness. PICTURE CREDIT: MADROVECTOR — FREEMIX

"Existing evidence does not show a clear link between in utero exposure to paracetamol and autism and ADHD [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder] in offspring," the United Kingdom-led team of researchers wrote in the review.

There have been several previous studies which suggested a possible link between paracetamol and autism or ADHD.

However the quality of those studies was "low to critically low", the review said, partly because they did not take adequate steps to rule out potentially misleading factors, such as whether autism runs in the family.

Paracetamol is the main ingredient in massively popular painkillers. PICTURE CREDIT: LUPENK — FREEMIX

These controversial previous studies also could not establish exactly how paracetamol might cause autism.

The umbrella review called for better research, pointing out that there has been a "historical and ongoing underinvestment in women's health research".

CONFIRMATION

Several researchers praised the new study.

Dimitrios Siassakos, professor in obstetrics and gynaecology at University College London, said the review "confirms what experts around the globe have been saying".

"Autistic and neurodivergent people are more likely to experience chronic pain, and they are also much more likely to have neurodivergent children. But paracetamol doesn't cause neurodivergence," said Steven Kapp of the University of Portsmouth.

"As a researcher and autistic person with ADHD, I think we should not be try-

Existing evidence does not show a clear link between in utero exposure to paracetamol and autism and ADHD in offspring

ing to prevent neurodivergence anyway, but make life better for neurodivergent people," he added.

Beyond paracetamol, Trump and his vaccine-sceptic Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr have repeatedly made unfounded claims about autism, including that there is an "epidemic" of cases.

However, experts maintain that the recent increase in autism rates is due to improved, broadened diagnosis methods along with growing awareness.



Heal

By AFP

WHO chief urges clampdown on nicotine products aimed at kids

SLEEK-LOOKING disposable e-cigarettes and candy-flavoured nicotine pouches are among a range of new products targeting young people and fuelling a new wave of tobacco and nicotine addiction, warned the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Speaking at the opening of a

global conference on tobacco control, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus decried that surging numbers of children were being drawn to the new products.

"Schools are the new frontline in the war against tobacco and nicotine, where companies are actively

recruiting generations of addicts," he warned.

A recently released WHO report estimated that nearly 15 million teens globally now use e-cigarettes.

Tedros hailed the dramatic progress that had been made in recent decades in clamping down on the deadly habit, although more than eight million people globally are still estimated to die from tobacco-related diseases each year.

For the past 20 years, tobacco consumption among young people "has declined by one third globally", he said, adding that this had prompted "tobacco manufacturers to develop new products to attract new customers".

The UN health agency questions the tobacco industry's marketing of vapes



The UN health agency questions the tobacco industry's marketing of vapes and other new products as safer alternatives to traditional tobacco products. PICTURE CREDIT:

JUICY-FISH — FREEPIK

"Let's be clear, the companies that make these products are not motivated by harm reduction or public health. They're motivated by one thing and one thing only — gigantic profits for their shareholders."

The WHO chief said his agency was calling on all countries to regulate nicotine pouches, e-cigarettes and heated tobacco "at least as strongly as they regulate conventional tobacco products".

He welcomed that several countries had banned such products outright, stressing that "those that have not should use strict controls on flavours, packaging, marketing and sales protections against industry interference and enforcement of age restrictions".

and other new products as safer alternatives to traditional tobacco products and as aids to stop smoking.

"There is no evidence of their net benefit for public health and mounting evidence of their harm," Tedros said, decrying that such products are being used to recruit young smokers.

The recent WHO report, he pointed out, showed that "in 63 countries from which data are available, the prevalence of vaping among adolescents is on average nine times higher than among adults".



Supported by the **Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission**

Online safety for kids

Social media ban a timely move

SEXUAL predation and cyberbullying are certainly on the rise and one way to curb them is to ban under-16s from having social media accounts. Malaysia is expected to do so next year, following the lead of Australia, which is expected to implement such a ban from Dec 10. As it was a much debated policy issue in Canberra, it will be so in Putrajaya, too. A gathering storm of expert opinions is already evident. But let's start with Australia, which passed the law in November last year, the world's first such legislative ban, whose aim it was stated to be to protect children's mental health and wellbeing. The law requires designated social media companies to adopt reasonable steps to prevent under-16 individuals from having such accounts with such platforms. Offending platforms face a hefty non-compliance penalty of A\$50 million. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, X, Snapchat and similar companies whose sole or significant purpose is to promote social interaction are in the radar.

Canberra's eSafety Commissioner website says the government is protecting young Australians at a critical stage of their development from social media platforms' "design features that encourage them to spend more time on screens, while also serving up content that can harm their health and wellbeing". It says Canberra's legislative move isn't a ban, but one that comes with an age limit. Once Australians reach 16,

Social media platforms have become a dark and dangerous world even for adults.

they can have their own accounts. The law imposing the age limit is also not aimed at penalising children or their parents but at punishing non-compliant social media companies. Australian children can still use the platforms, but they won't be able to post material on the service. To save themselves from harm they are advised to do so under the su-

pervision of their parents. Social media platforms have become a dark and dangerous world even for adults. Little wonder, in addition to Malaysia, other countries like Denmark and Norway are following Australia's lead.

Malaysia's Communications Minister Datuk Fahmi Fadzil said on Sunday that Putrajaya is aiming to implement the ban on social media accounts for children aged 16 and below starting next year. While the cabinet has decided to prohibit Malaysians under 16 from having social media accounts, the government is studying the mechanism used in countries like Australia. Fahmi said in addition to the Online Safety Act, coming into force on Jan 1, and the Communications and Multimedia Act, the government was reviewing the implementation of a general age limit, including enforcement mechanisms. Malaysian academics and other experts are saying the planned ban is a timely initiative but at the same time are calling for a balanced approach. A hard ban will lead to a "digital cliff" dilemma, meaning total digital isolation, said one.

It is unclear what form Malaysia's under-16 social media ban will take, but as Fahmi put it "if the government, regulatory bodies and parents play their roles, we can ensure that the Internet in Malaysia is not only fast, widespread and affordable, but most importantly, safe, especially for children and families".

ESSENTIAL NEEDS

KING: ENSURE ADEQUATE AID FOR FLOOD VICTIMS

Sultan Ibrahim instructs Nadma on safety, supplies at all relief centres

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WITH the flood situation worsening in the country and the number of evacuees standing at 22,983 up to 4pm yesterday, His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim, King of Malaysia, has weighed in on the matter.

The king said that all essential supplies should be fully provided to flood evacuees at temporary relief centres.

Sultan Ibrahim, on Facebook, instructed the National Disaster Management Agency (Nadma) to ensure the relief centres were safe, well-maintained and capable of supporting evacuees.

"Ensure basic amenities, food supplies and medical aid are sufficiently available," he said through the Royal Press Office.

Sultan Ibrahim also reminded people to follow evacuation orders and avoid dangerous areas.

He expressed appreciation to security forces, rescue agencies, volunteers and all parties working tirelessly to help affected communities.

The king also offered prayers for the safety and resilience of all flood victims facing the disaster.

The 22,983 flood victims come from 7,300 families, housed in 110 relief centres across 22 districts in seven states, according to the National Disaster Command Centre (NDCC).

The hardest-hit states are Kelantan (9,564 victims), Perlis (5,966) and Perak (3,092), with national trends indicating a continued rise in evacuee numbers.

Kelantan continues to record the highest number of relief centres at 40.

While major districts such as Tumpat and Kota Baru have seen a decline in flood numbers, Bachok and Pasir Puteh have reported rising evacuee figures.

Perlis remains fully affected by flooding, with 1,516 families evacuated — a figure that continues to climb.

In Perak, all 35 relief centres have reported increasing numbers of victims, particularly in Manjung, Perak Tengah, Bagan Datuk and Hillir Perak.

Selangor has 751 families (2,729 victims) in 20 relief centres, with flood levels rising in Kuala Selangor, Klang and Sabak Bernam, while Petaling and Hulu Langat show some improvement.

Localised floods in Kedah (1,503 victims), Penang (87 victims) and Pahang (42 victims) are being monitored, with Pahang's Lipis district newly affected.

Multiple thunderstorms, heavy

rain and strong wind warnings remain in effect across the peninsula, Sabah and Sarawak.

The Meteorological Department has issued continuous rain alerts for parts of Kelantan, Terengganu, Perak and Pahang until today, with several areas placed under the "severe" and "danger" categories.

High-risk zones include Kelantan's Tumpat, Pasir Mas, Kota Baru, Bachok and Pasir Puteh; Perlis; Kedah's Langkawi, Kubang Pasu, Kota Setar, Pendang and Sik; and Terengganu's Besut, Setiu, Hulu Terengganu and Kuala Terengganu.

Telemetry readings indicate several rivers approaching or exceeding alert thresholds, including Sungai Batu Pahat (Johor), Sungai Perlis (Padang Besar, Arau, Kangar) and Sungai Prai (Penang). No rivers are at danger levels, but conditions remain dynamic due to ongoing rainfall.

Up to 4pm, over 100 roads have been closed, partially closed or restricted due to flooding, landslides, collapsed slopes or structural damage.

NDCC reported that major dams remained mostly at normal or watch levels, though several were at full capacity, including Congkak, Bekok and Linggiu (Johor), Timah Tasoh (Perlis), Sungai Semenyih and Klang Gates (Selangor) and Sungai Beringin and Ulu Sepri (Negri Sembilan).

Authorities are monitoring inflows due to ongoing rainfall.

Apa Yang Berlaku PADA BADAN

Bila Kita Minum Air Suam

Berita Harian 26/11/2025 MS/33

DALAM usaha menjaga pemakanan harian, pemilihan sumber protein yang sihat menjadi keutamaan bagi ramai orang. Dua pilihan yang paling kerap dibandingkan ialah ikan dan ayam. Kedua-duanya mempunyai protein yang tinggi, mudah didapati dan boleh disediakan dalam pelbagai cara masakan.

namun begitu, tahap kesihatan seseorang makanan bergantung kepada kandungan nutrisi, cara penyediaan, serta keperluan individu.

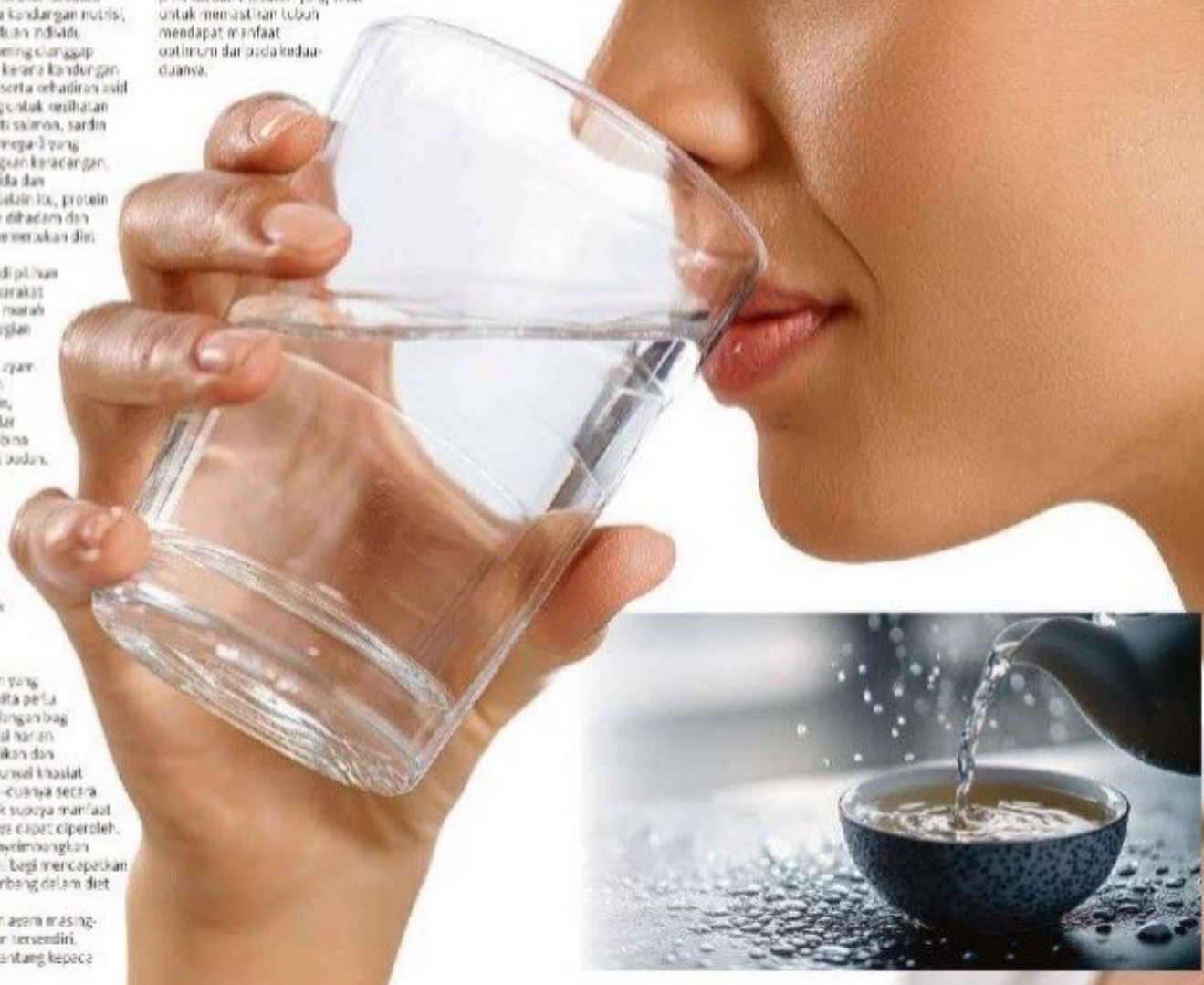
Secara umumnya, ikan sering dianggap lebih sihat berbanding ayam kerana kandungan lemaknya yang lebih rendah serta kehadiran asid lemak omega-3 yang penting untuk kesihatan jantung dan otak. Ikan seperti salmon, sardin dan tongkol mengandungi omega-3 yang boleh membantu mengurangkan kolesterol, menstabilkan kadar trigliserida dan menyokong fungsi kognitif. Selain itu, protein dalam ikan juga lebih mudah dihadam dan sesuai untuk mereka yang memerkenai diet rendah lemak.

Ayam pula sering menjadi pilihan utama dalam kalangan masyarakat disebalik nasi yang sepopuler, murah dan mempunyai banyak bahagian yang mengandungi protein, terutamanya bahagian dada ayam tanpa kulit. Kerana ia rendah lemak tepu dan tinggi protein, menjadikannya pilihan popular bagi mereka yang ingin membina otot atau menurunkan berat badan. Ayam juga lebih serba guna dalam penyediaan hidangan harian. Namun, kandungan nutrisinya boleh terjejas jika dimasak menggunakan kaedah yang tidak sihat seperti menggoreng atau menggunakan terlalu banyak minyak.

Realitinya, tiada satu pun makanan yang mampu memekalkan semua nutrisi yang diperlukan tubuh. Oleh itu, kita perlu menikmati pelbagai jenis hidangan bagi memastikan keperluan nutrisi harian dipenuhi. Ika dibandingkan, ikan dan ayam masing-masing mempunyai khasiat tersendiri. Mengambil kedua-duanya secara bergilir adalah pilihan terbaik supaya manfaat nutrisi daripada kedua-duanya dapat diperoleh. Individu juga digalakkan menyeimbangkan kedua-dua sumber protein ini bagi mencapai variasi nutrisi yang lebih seimbang dalam diet harian.

Kesimpulannya, ikan dan ayam masing-masing mempunyai kelebihan tersendiri, dan pilihan paling sihat bergantung kepada

keperluan tubuh serta cara penyediaannya. Bagi mereka yang mengutamakan kesihatan jantung dan pemakanan rendah lemak, ikan merupakan pilihan lebih baik. Namun, ayam tanpa kulit yang dimasak dengan cara yang sihat tetap menjadi sumber protein yang berkualiti dan berkesan. Yang penting, amalkan kepelbagaian dan pilih kaedah masakan yang sihat untuk memastikan tubuh mendapat manfaat optimum daripada kedua-duanya.



M'sians urged to seek medically regulated providers

PETALING JAYA: Amid rising complaints against unregulated wellness centres, aesthetic dermatologist Dr Lim Ing Kien is urging Malaysians to seek only medically regulated providers and beware of fear-based sales tactics.

Responding to the Federation of Malaysian Consumers Associations' (Fomca) report on aggressive package-selling, Lim, founder of Medii Skin Studio, Skynfyx, and Ventamin, stressed that legitimate aesthetic clinics operate under strict Health Ministry standards, unlike many operators functioning in regulatory grey areas.

"All our doctors are Malaysian Medical Council-registered, we use only ministry-approved devices and follow proper documentation and informed consent protocols. That is the minimum standard patients should expect."

He emphasised that all treatments must be supported by peer-reviewed clinical studies and regulatory approval.

"Aesthetic medicine does not cure chronic diseases. We never claim to treat conditions like diabetes or hypertension – those require proper medical care."

Addressing misleading promotions, Lim said

his clinics prioritise transparency.

"We practise clear pricing with no hidden fees, provide written treatment plans and never force same-day decisions."

He warned consumers to watch for red flags such as free "health screenings" detecting fake issues, high-pressure sales, non-refundable packages and claims of curing serious illnesses.

For older consumers, he advised verifying Health Ministry registration, reviewing contracts with family and walking away from providers using fear or urgency.

"Aesthetic medicine is meant to enhance appearance safely. It does not cure illnesses or require rushed decisions."

"The regulatory gaps highlighted by Fomca must be addressed urgently. Always choose providers who prioritise your wellbeing over sales targets."

Complaints have surged against a nationwide wellness and massage chain, with consumers alleging sudden service restrictions, inaccessible bookings and prolonged refund delays despite paying thousands upfront for prepaid packages.

Several customers reported that outlets

promised under packages were abruptly reduced from over 30 branches to fewer than eight without prior notice or compensation.

One customer said her local outlet closed shortly after buying a RM2,699 package, forcing her to travel more than an hour each way.

"It is impractical and not what we were promised," she said.

Booking difficulties were widespread: constant "fully booked" notices, WhatsApp-only reservations and new rules requiring seven-day advance bookings made redemption almost impossible.

Some reported cancellations for vague reasons such as "maintenance" or unrelated events while app balances disappeared.

Refund requests submitted via Google Forms went unanswered for weeks, often with deductions or delays exceeding 14 days.

Consumers claim that these practices may breach sections 10, 16 and 53 of the Consumer Protection Act 1999, constituting misleading sales and unfair business conduct.

They are calling on authorities to reinstate prepaid packages under original terms or issue full refunds. – BY KIRTINEE RAMESH

'Elderly being coerced into costly wellness packages'

➤ Some centres close abruptly, leaving customers with unused sessions while instalments continue: Fomca

■ BY KIRTINEE RAMESH
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PETALING JAYA: Malaysia's wellness and aesthetic industry, once celebrated for promoting health and vitality, is under scrutiny for exploiting vulnerable seniors.

Elderly consumers are being lured by fear-driven health claims, pressured into costly long-term prepaid packages and left with little recourse, warned the Federation of Malaysian Consumers Associations (Fomca).

Its CEO Dr Saravanan Thambirajah said complaints involving prepaid wellness packages are surging.

"The National Consumer Complaints Centre has verified 38 cases in which packages became unusable, totalling more than RM65,000 in losses.

"New cases are reported almost daily, showing that this is a systemic issue, not isolated incidents."

According to Fomca, many operators present themselves as experts in "health improvement", "preventive therapy", "energy treatment" or "holistic rejuvenation".

"Some centres offer genuine wellness services, but others cross the line by using medical-sounding claims to push expensive long-term packages."

Sales tactics often start with free talks, roadshows or "health screenings" targeted at older adults. Consumers are told that they have poor circulation or early signs of disease, which are claims designed to create fear and urgency.

"Once frightened, consumers are pushed into signing packages worth thousands. In some cases, staff have even taken customers' phones to activate 'Buy Now, Pay Later' plans without explanation.

"These are not wellness consultations. These are psychological pressure sessions disguised as health advice."

The wellness sector spans therapy centres, slimming outlets, spas, aesthetic clinics,



Saravanan advised Malaysians to treat free screenings with caution, never sign packages on the spot, keep personal devices in their control and review contracts with family before committing.
— ADIB RAWI
YAHYA/THESUN

alternative therapy providers and lifestyle clubs.

"Problems arise when operators claim to treat or reverse chronic illnesses, such as diabetes or heart disease, with no scientific basis," he said.

He added that some centres close abruptly, leaving customers with unused sessions while instalments continue.

"Because financial contracts are legally separate from the service provider, consumers remain bound to pay despite receiving nothing."

Saravanan pointed to regulatory gaps between the Health Ministry and the Domestic Trade and Cost of Living Ministry as a key reason these abuses persist.

"While the Health Ministry regulates medical facilities, many operators avoid calling themselves healthcare providers, even when using diagnostic-like equipment.

"Meanwhile, the Domestic Trade and Cost of Living Ministry oversees advertising and contracts, but blurred lines between lifestyle and health make enforcement difficult."

Senior citizens are particularly at risk due to trust in authority, fear-based messaging and limited familiarity with digital finance.

"This is targeted exploitation, not marketing," he emphasised.

He added that contracts obtained under pressure, misleading claims or hidden clauses may be unenforceable.

"A fair contract should clearly outline pricing, duration, services, refunds and cancellation terms, without letting the company withdraw services unilaterally."

Fomca is calling for government action, urging both ministries to jointly set clear rules on advertising, sales practices, contract standards and protections for elderly consumers.

Health-related claims, especially those involving serious illnesses, must be closely scrutinised, he said.

Saravanan advised Malaysians to treat free screenings with caution, never sign packages on the spot, keep personal devices in their control and review contracts with family before committing.

Consumers misled by wellness operators can contact the National Consumer Complaints Centre at 03-7877 1076 or 03-7865 3441, or visit www.nccc.org.my.

"When fear, manipulation and vague health claims are used to extract money, especially from the elderly, the system has failed. Malaysia must close this regulatory gap before more are harmed."