

Govt extends RM40m grant to AIDS council

KUALA LUMPUR: The government, in its determination to fight HIV/AIDS, has approved a RM40 million grant to the Malaysian AIDS Council, to be disbursed over the next 10 years.

Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng said yesterday the grant of RM4 million a year "would start this year and the government hopes that it would be used for educational campaigns.

"The cabinet recently decided to provide the grant to the Malaysian AIDS Council as the foundation and its affiliates are more visible in conducting awareness and preventive campaigns," he said after opening a pre-budget dialogue between the Health Ministry and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) at a hotel here.

Last year, the country recorded 6,000 new HIV/AIDS cases, bringing the total to 44,000.

"We have the resources to fight HIV/AIDS and we know the high risk group, which is drug users, but unless greater effort is put in, we cannot stop the spread of this disease," Chua said.

Malaysian AIDS Council president Datu Paduka Marina Rahathir said the

grant was a much needed relief to the foundation.

"We need the money to train NGOs to fight HIV/AIDS. It is good to learn that our proposal has been accepted by the ministry and the cabinet," she said.

She said the grant would be used to fund various awareness campaigns organised by the relevant NGOs to curb the spread of the HIV virus.

Chua said the ministry's ability to give financial aid to the NGOs is limited and they must not depend too much on the government for assistance.

He said RM1.24 million was channelled to NGOs in 1999 and nearly RM2 million in 2000, and the amount was increased to RM8.4 million last year. This year, RM11 million has been allocated.

On top of that, the government has approved a "Matching Ringgit for Ringgit Grant" this year for NGOs involved in activities for the prevention and treatment of diseases not funded under any aid scheme.

The programme is one way to subsidise the NGOs, with the government giving a subsidy of RM1 for every RM1 raised by them.

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