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Chua-Grants (Bilingual)

MALAYSIAN AIDS COUNCIL GRANTED WISH WITH RM40 MILLION AID

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 22 (Bernama) -- The government, in its vigour to fight the HIV/AIDS menace in the country, has approved a RM40 million grant to the Malaysian AIDS Council, to be disbursed over the next 10 years, to counter the deadly disease.

Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng said today that the grant of RM4 million a year would start this year and the government hoped that it would be used for HIV/AIDS educational and preventive awareness 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 told reporters after opening the pre-Budget dialogue between the Health Ministry and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) at the Pan Pacific Hotel, here.

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

Chua said: "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."

Malaysian AIDS Council president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, when met by reporters at the opening, 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 added.

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

Meanwhile, in his speech, Chua said the ministry hoped that all NGOs would work to strengthen their financial position through various means like fundraising.

"The ministry's and government'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.

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

On top of that, the government had 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, he said.

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

The assistance was limited to RM1 million for each NGO and the NGO had to be registered with the Registrar of Societies and the service rendered must be non-profit oriented, he added.

"The NGOs must also have trained technical staff, must not be discriminatory in accepting patients and must provide clinical treatment including scheduled treatment," he said.

He also called on the NGOs to extend their services to the rural areas to benefit everyone.

-- BERNAMA

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