

# Experts: Expand Madani Medical Scheme, boost human resources

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Healthcare professionals have welcomed Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's statement that the sector would remain a key focus of the 2024 Budget, saying this was proof of the government's concern for the people's wellbeing.

Public health medicine specialist Datuk Dr Zainal Ariffin Omar said that as healthcare and economic growth were intertwined, it was commendable that the healthcare sector remained a priority for the government.

"A good healthcare system is critical to productivity and economic growth. Making the healthcare sector a key focus is the way it should be," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Dr Zainal said among the areas the budget should focus on were human resources, new healthcare facilities, digital health and

universal healthcare

He said the Madani Medical Scheme should be expanded to ensure more people could enjoy free medical treatment at registered private clinics.

The target group for the scheme includes recipients of the Rahmah Cash Aid Phase 1 this year in three categories within the Bottom 40 group: families, senior citizens (without spouses), and singles, with automatic eligibility.

The recipients can enjoy acute primary care services and outpatient treatment at such clinics under the Madani Scheme, with the allocation of treatment benefits for

each family up to RM250, senior citizens (without a spouse) (RM125) and single individuals (RM75).



*Datuk Dr Zainal Ariffin Omar*

Former Muslim Doctors Association vice-president Dr Wan Julia Sham Ariffin also praised Anwar's decision to prioritise healthcare funding and resources.

However, she highlighted the need to invest in medical education to produce more specialists and increase the number of permanent medical officers.

She stressed the importance of increasing their numbers, mainly to handle the increasing patient load and prevent overwork

among doctors and medical specialists.

"A sufficient number of medical officers could provide better healthcare services to patients, along with improved working conditions for doctors," she said.

To address the medical specialist shortage, she said, the government should support and encourage doctors to pursue specialist training abroad, in countries like China, India, Russia, the United States and the United Kingdom (UK).

"(Studying in countries like China and Russia would allow Malaysians to) learn from their advanced technologies.

"Exploring their technology is

crucial, as they have demonstrated their ability to develop vaccines quickly and efficiently, making them excel beyond the UK and Australia," Dr Wan Julia said.



*Dr Wan Julia Sham Ariffin*

Among other areas she hoped the government could look into were upgrading the information technology (IT) systems in government hospitals, especially in urban areas, and providing doctors with free computers for their daily work in the wards.

Anwar, who is also finance minister, is scheduled to table the budget on Oct 13 in the Dewan Rakyat. **By Nor Ain Mohamed Radhi and Amalia Azmi**