

PRESS STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
2 APRIL 2020

Strengthening Health Expertise in Government Decisions

The Malaysian Health Coalition welcomes the appointment of Tan Sri Dr Jemilah Mahmood as the Special Advisor to the Prime Minister for Public Health, effective 1 April 2020. Her experience, stature and networks of trust will strengthen Malaysia's responses to Covid-19. We will provide her our fullest support.

During this crisis, we understand that government decisions have good intentions but steep trade-offs. We believe that stronger health and public health expertise in the National Security Council and other Ministries will help manage the unintended consequences of any decisions.

More specifically, we urge the government to consider the following unintended consequences:

1. **10km-radius Restriction**: to issue a clear exemption for those seeking healthcare. For example, Malaysians travel an average of 83km for cancer radiotherapy (228km in Sabah and Sarawak). Institut Jantung Negara hosts patients from all over Malaysia, and many travel long distances to receive dialysis. We cannot compromise on routine and necessary non-Covid-19 healthcare.
2. **Disinfection of Public Places**: to issue a directive that all disinfection of public places must follow Health Ministry guidelines, instead of uncoordinated decisions not based on any evidence.
3. **"Third Wave" of Infections**: viral videos of poor living conditions in government quarantine facilities indicate potential non-Covid-19 health risks and a potential public relations nightmare. The government should consider quarantines in under-utilised hotels, which also increases employment. Private sector hotels should consider providing a generous price as national service.
4. **Appropriate NGO Operations**: while intended to reduce infection risk, the unintended consequence is that the poorest and neediest will suffer more. The government should issue an interim protocol that balances public safety with effective delivery of NGO services to cover all gaps.
5. **Ramadan & Syawal**: decisions regarding mass gatherings (such as bazaars) during Ramadan and Syawal must be taken together with religious authorities, the Health Ministry and local authorities, and not through unilateral decisions.

We understand the difficult choices for any government during this crisis. We urge the government to fully utilise health expertise at the highest levels of government to fully prepare for all consequences.

BERKHIDMAT UNTUK NEGARA.

Malaysian Health Coalition

41 Member Societies & 16 Individuals

Full Signature List on myhealthcoalition.org.

2 April 2020