

JOINT STATEMENT

THINK TANKS SUPPORT THE ADOPTION OF THE HEALTH EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN (HEAP)

21 JULY 2021, KUALA LUMPUR:

We welcome the comprehensive efforts that have accelerated vaccination, which has made Malaysia among the top countries in the world for COVID-19 vaccination rate. However, our nation is still fighting an uphill battle driven by the emergence of new, more contagious variants. With a continuous rise in active cases, our public healthcare system is on the brink of collapse, especially in the Klang Valley. Our overworked health frontliners and limited health resources are at a breaking point.

In terms of Malaysia's march towards recovery and a return to pre-pandemic life, our nation embarrassingly ranks last in The Economist's global return to normalcy index. Malaysia has the worst score of 27.3 among the 50 nations in July, falling from a score of 55 in April. Similarly, Malaysia experienced a drastic drop from 16th in January to 51st out of 53 countries in June, in Bloomberg's Covid Resilience Ranking. As time progresses, Malaysia has somewhat lost the ability to build resilience against the virus.

It is time for a fresh approach to national strategies in fighting this outbreak. We need to look beyond repeated lockdowns which have multitudinous repercussions. With Covid-19 becoming endemic, we need to employ a stronger whole of society approach with increased public engagement. The government needs to proactively address the growing trust deficit among the rakyat and rebuild confidence through greater accountability and transparency.

Thus, we strongly support the HEALTH EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN (HEAP) published by a group of health experts. We call on the government to effectively consider and act on the following key recommendations of HEAP:

1. Stopping the community spread of Covid-19 by having a comprehensive national testing strategy, which includes tracing all contacts, enabling public self-tests, allowing home quarantine with monitoring, and limiting non-critical social interaction.
2. Ramping up genome testing to monitor Covid-19 variants.
3. Increasing support for public hospitals and clinics by improving conditions for contract staff, growing ventilation and ICU capacities, ensuring respites for staff, and ensuring a multi-sectoral approach with civil society support.
4. Data transparency and sharing with the public is important. The media should be engaged as partners to communicate better metrics that can monitor the pandemic and hospital situations, as well as to combat rumours and fake news.
5. Federal government should work with state governments to empower the state governments to set up a state-level health team to make decisions, act and respond to local situations rapidly. Granular data on states and district be provided to all state government to help them make informed decisions and respond accordingly at the local level.
6. The National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme (PIC) needs to be improved, with less reliance on mega vaccination centres (PPV), and better use of health clinics, school health teams and general practitioners. Outreach programmes are necessary to reach those unable to register, as well as to non-citizens. Equitable vaccination distribution is important for all states.

7. Community responsibility and support is integral to making headway in the battle against the pandemic. This requires simpler, science-based SOPs, using RTK-Ag testing, significant improvements in workplace ventilation, and a financial safety net for the poor.

It is time for all of us to work together and put out hands to the plough to rescue our nation and our rakyat from this health crisis. Let us not wait any longer before more lives are lost, more families destroyed, our healthcare system collapses and our nation impacted beyond repair.
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