

Five million individuals affected by kidney crisis in Malaysia

SHAH ALAM: Malaysia is facing a mounting kidney health crisis, with more than five million people living with chronic kidney disease – and a staggering 95% unaware of their condition, Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said.

He disclosed that about 10,000 new cases progress to end-stage renal failure annually, while over 50,000 patients are currently undergoing haemodialysis and peritoneal (home-based treatment) dialysis nationwide, placing growing strain on the healthcare system.

Speaking at the national-level World Kidney Day 2026 celebration, Dzulkefly underscored the urgent need to rethink healthcare delivery, not only to improve patient outcomes but also to address environmental sustainability.

“It is very important for all of us to be mindful of the direction in which we are heading,” he told reporters

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after launching the event, which carried the theme “Kidney Health for All – Caring for People, Protecting the Planet”, yesterday.

He highlighted that treatments such as dialysis are highly resource and energy-intensive, raising concerns about the environmental impact.

“When we provide treatment, it must not come at the expense of the environment,” he said, stressing the importance of reducing healthcare’s carbon footprint.

He pointed to the growing global shift towards “green nephrology”, a concept championed locally by the Malaysian Society of Nephrology and

the National Kidney Foundation Malaysia, which promotes prevention and more sustainable, cost-effective treatment approaches.

“Moving forward, this will be the direction of our policy – to strike a balance between delivering effective treatment and minimising environmental impact,” he said, adding that this aligns with national strategies such as the Peritoneal Dialysis First (PD-First) policy, expanded haemodialysis services and organ transplantation efforts.

He cautioned that without decisive intervention, the number of Malaysians requiring dialysis could exceed 100,000 by 2040, further burdening public healthcare resources.

Beyond kidney disease, Dzulkefly emphasised the wider challenge posed by non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which have become a major national health and economic burden.

“Direct healthcare costs alone amount to approximately RM17 billion annually, rising to RM64.3 billion when factoring in indirect costs such as lost productivity, absenteeism, presenteeism and premature deaths.

“These are deaths that occur before the average life expectancy – around 73 to 75 years for men and slightly higher for women – many of which are preventable.

“The kidney organ may be small – roughly the size of a fist – but it plays a vital role in sustaining life. When its function is compromised, quality of life is significantly affected.”

Dzulkefly reiterated that prevention remains the most sustainable solution, particularly in tackling diabetes, a key driver of kidney failure in Malaysia.

He said the government has intensified efforts such as the war on sugar campaign and reinvested revenue from the tax of sugar-sweetened beverages into advanced treatments, including SGLT2 inhibitors, which are a class of oral medications that treat type 2 diabetes.

At the same time, the ministry is expanding access to peritoneal dialysis, with patient uptake rising to 42% from 36.6% in 2020 – reflecting the success of the PD-First policy.

Currently, 3,161 patients are receiving peritoneal dialysis in public healthcare facilities.

He noted that peritoneal dialysis offers several advantages, including lower water and energy usage compared to haemodialysis, making it a more environmentally sustainable option. The financial burden of treating end-stage kidney disease has also surged, from RM572 million in 2010 to RM3.3 billion annually today, underscoring the urgency of shifting towards preventive care.

Dzulkefly also highlighted the importance of organ donation, describing transplantation as a more effective long-term solution compared with prolonged dialysis, while calling for stronger collaboration with NGOs to expand screening programmes and public awareness.

He urged Malaysians to take advantage of free screening initiatives such as the National Health Screening Initiative and the PeKa B40 scheme.

“Do not wait until you feel unwell. Kidney disease often progresses silently. Go for screenings and do not delay – because prevention is always better than regret.”



Dzulkefly (centre) cautioned that without decisive intervention, the number of Malaysians requiring dialysis could exceed 100,000 by 2040, further burdening public healthcare resources. – ADAM AMIR HAMZAH/THESUN