



# Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

檳城消費人協會 பினாங்கு பயனர்களர் சங்கம்

Websites:  
[www.consumer.org.my](http://www.consumer.org.my)

10 Jalan Masjid Negeri, 11600 Pulau Pinang, Malaysia  
Tel: 604-8299511 Fax: 604-8298109  
email: [consumerofpenang@gmail.com](mailto:consumerofpenang@gmail.com)

Press Statement

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## Malaysia is unprepared for an ageing society

The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) urges the government to prioritise the needs of the country's ageing population instead of encouraging the construction of retirement villages which serves only a small segment of society.

We call upon the government to adopt the Universal Design, a framework for the designing of living and working spaces, and products to benefit the widest possible range of people to use in the widest range of situations without the need of special or separate design. A simple example of the Universal Design application is the inclusion of ramps in buildings that can be used by most people of all ages, health conditions, and for multiple uses.

Our call is in line with the prediction that by 2030, Malaysians aged 60 and above is expected to increase to 15 per cent as compared to only three per cent aged 65 and above in 1970. With that change, the country has to address the needs of the ageing population.

In the very first instance, Malaysia is not even prepared as it only has 35 geriatricians in 2018 when about 650 of them are needed. Can the country produce enough geriatricians in another decade?

Senior citizens are prone to financial instability because they are often considered 'unemployable' because of their age and health condition. In the meantime, their health problems (particularly the chronic and debilitating illnesses) as well as the escalating healthcare costs negatively impact on their living expenses.

In September 2020, it was reported that half of all Employees Provident Fund (EPF) contributors have savings of less than RM50,000 for their retirement. Even living off on RM1,000 per month will only last the person about 4 years. Reality hits when EPF stated that 90 per cent of rural households and 86 per cent of urban ones have no savings, let alone financing their healthcare

In recent years there were promotions of retirement villages, even touted by the government as the way forward, but there will be few who can afford such luxury. Currently homes for the elderly come under three broad categories, those operated under the Social Welfare Department (SWD), the non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the profit-motivated private providers.

In such a predicament, what future do they have? According to Social Welfare Department 2018 Year Book, there were 6,927 senior citizens in registered care centres operated by NGOs and private establishments.

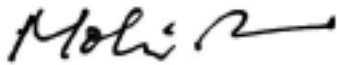
The government should encourage NGOs to augment the role taken up by SWD than that of private providers in operating retirement villages that does not fulfil the needs of the larger segment of the elderly population. NGOs are providing a range of services to support an individual in their own home; operating day care centres; and residential homes for those who need to be institutionalised.

These care centres or residential homes have limited purposes as they can only take in limited number of

residents and are expensive to operated. As long as the elderly person is relatively healthy and physically independent, it is advisable for him to remain integrated in the community but the community must have facilities to accommodate his needs such as building features (e.g. unobstructed passages and gentle ramps) for the less able.

Singapore's Housing and Building Board (HDB) has been proactive in coping with Singapore's ageing population. HDB incorporated Universal Design into its city planning so that its housing projects will accommodate residents of all ages – from children to the elderly – with ample community spaces. The HDB projects added fitness facilities for every age group regardless of their health condition. Lift buttons have Braille markings to ensure that the visually impaired are not left out.

Malaysia will not be able to address the problems caused by a declining birth rate and a growing ageing population if it does not start now. We call upon the government and the private sector to adopt the Universal Design.



**MOHIDEEN ABDUL KADER**  
**Presiden**  
**Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang**