



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Press Statement

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CAP: Ban the sale of sugary drinks at public places

The Consumers Association of Penang calls on the authorities to ban the sale of sugary drinks from vending machines at hospitals, schools and other public places.

The call is made following the actions taken by Western Australian authorities to ban the sale of sugary drinks as part of measures to combat obesity. Under the policy, all vending machines and retail outlets including cafes, gift shops and kiosks are not allowed to sell sugar-sweetened drinks that have low or no nutritional value. The sugary drinks include soft drinks, iced tea, energy and sports drinks and some fruit juices, flavoured waters and milks.

Malaysia should take the cue from this as she has the highest prevalence of obesity among adults in Southeast Asia. In the 2019 National Health and Morbidity Survey, 50.1 percent of our adult population were reported to be overweight (30.4 percent) or obese (19.7 percent).

In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic there is an urgent need to curb the rising prevalence of obesity among Malaysians. Obesity is a risk factor for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and several types of cancers such as breast, large intestine, pancreas and kidney cancers. Compared with normal-weight individuals, obesity increases the risks of type 2 diabetes by sevenfold in men and 12-fold in women.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) patients with cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease, diabetes and cancer are more vulnerable to becoming severely ill when they get Covid-19.

According to the Ministry of Health, Covid-19 patients with NCDs fare worse than others, with over 85% of those who died here having pre-existing conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure. An obese individual has an 81 percent higher risk of heart disease and 64 percent for stroke. In addition, Asian populations are predisposed to type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular diseases at lower body mass index (BMI).

Besides that, the economic costs for these diseases are enormous. The conservative estimate of diabetes and cardiovascular disease was RM70.1 billion in 2017, equivalent to about 5.1 percent of Malaysia's gross domestic product in the same year.

A local study found that 30 percent of our type 2 diabetes patients were clinically obese. Diabetic patients need to achieve as many ABC treatment goals as possible to prevent complications like cardiovascular disease, kidney disease, and foot complications. (A for A1C that reflects blood sugar control over the past three months, B for blood pressure and C for LDL-cholesterol or bad cholesterol).

Diabetic patients who were obese were 1.5 times less likely to achieve ABC goals than normal weight patients. Weight reduction is a great strategy for overweight and obese patients to improve blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol control.

Worldwide evidence shows that diabetes is happening at younger ages, i.e., below 40 years old. One of the main causes is the rising obesity prevalence. Young-onset diabetes is associated with more aggressive disease and higher risks of complications.

The presence of vending machines packed with sugary drinks at public places makes it difficult for young consumers to control their temptation for such unhealthy drinks.

In the past, CAP made numerous calls to the authorities to ban the sale of sugary drinks from vending machines as studies have shown that Malaysians are consuming too much sugar in their diet. However to date no action has been taken and the number of Malaysians suffering from obesity keeps escalating.

In view of the Covid-19 pandemic there is an urgent need to ban the sale of sugary drinks from vending machines as it will contribute to obesity which is a risk factor for NCDs.

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