



# Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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## Press Statement

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### The Burden of Diabetes in Malaysia

Diabetes has become a condition of epidemic proportion worldwide and it is a cause for concern, prompting World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) to declare November 14 as World Diabetes Day.

In Malaysia, in spite of many campaigns against diabetes, its prevalence especially that of Type 2 has increased to epidemic proportions. At the current population of 33 million and at the prevalence rate of 18.3 percent it is estimated that there are more than 6 million diabetics in Malaysia. Diabetes in Malaysia is expected to continue to climb at an increased rate due to the typical Malaysian diet and lifestyle - a diet rich in saturated fats and refined carbohydrates which has detrimental effects on the metabolism.

In fact, the disease is so prevalent that one in every five Malaysians has been diagnosed with it, and children as young as five and six years old have been diagnosed with Type II Diabetes.

As obesity is a major contributing factor to diabetes, the need to battle obesity is instrumental to reduce the alarming increase of diabetes among Malaysians. According to WHO Malaysians ranked sixth among Asian countries with high adult obesity rate.

Diabetes not only has a negative impact on the quality of life and health care costs but also increases the economic burden of individuals, families and communities, thus affecting national productivity.

According to a report released by the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the World Health Organization (WHO) in August 2022, it was shown that the annual direct health care costs from diabetes in Malaysia was RM4.93 billion, 227 per cent higher than cancer (RM1.34 billion) and 11 per cent higher than cardiovascular disease (RM3.90 billion).

Diabetes consumed the highest annual health care spending among the three chronic illnesses at 45.4 per cent, compared to cardiovascular disease (CVD) at 40.7 per cent and cancer at 13.9 per cent. In other words, for every ringgit spent on the three NCDs, 45 sen goes to diabetes, 41 sen goes to CVD, and 14 sen to cancer.

The diabetes prevalence rate in Malaysia has risen much faster than expected, almost doubling in magnitude over the last decade. Diabetes does not only take a toll on the country's resources, but also on the limbs (amputation), eyesight (blindness), kidney (failure), heart (failure) and nerve (damage) of its sufferers.

As November 14 is World Diabetes Day, CAP calls on consumers to practice healthy lifestyle which will help to prevent type 2 diabetes and its complications. As such consumers should:

- Achieve and maintain healthy body weight (BMI 18-23kg/m<sup>2</sup>);
- Be physically active – at least 30 minutes of regular, moderate-intensity activity on most days. More activity is required for weight control;
- Eat a healthy diet, avoiding sugar and saturated fats intake.
- Avoid tobacco use – smoking increases the risk of diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.
- Reduce their sugar consumption by reducing the intake of processed foods and drinks, especially soft drinks – which are also called “liquid candy” in the West.

It is high time the authorities take a serious approach to manage diabetes in the country. With the alarming rate of diabetes among Malaysians the authorities have to bear a heavy financial burden, productivity losses and serious health burden resulting from disability and loss of healthy life years.

In view of the escalating number of diabetics in the country, CAP urges the authorities to:

- Ban the use of High Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS), a cheap and unhealthy substitute for refined sugar, in food products.
- Require manufacturers to avoid or reduce sugar in their products.
- Amend labeling laws to make manufacturers change their labels to clearly indicate the amount of sugar in their food by showing the number of teaspoonful of sugar in their foods.
- Stop the advertisements of high-sugared and other junk food and drinks in television.
- Ban the sale of junk food in school canteens and food hawking within a fixed perimeter around schools so that schoolchildren are not tempted to purchase unhealthy food.
- Initiate the removal of vending machines dispensing junk food and sugary drinks from areas such as hospitals, airports and schools. Instead provide drinking water in water dispensers at these places.
- Launch a massive campaign in the mass media to educate the public on the dangers of diabetes.
- Launch a massive campaign to encourage consumers to engage in physical activities to avoid being obese.
- Stop issuing 24 hours licenses to eating outlets

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