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## Press Statement

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### CAP: Diabetes the Silent Epidemic

The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) have declared November 14 as World Diabetes Day. Since it was launched in 1991 it has become the primary awareness campaign for the global diabetes community.

In 2023 WHO campaign will focus on the importance of knowing the risk of type 2 diabetes. The campaign will also highlight the impact of diabetes-related complications besides focusing on the importance of having access to the right information and care in the treatment and management of diabetes.

In spite of many campaigns against diabetes, its prevalence, especially that of Type 2 has increased to epidemic proportions in Malaysia. Yearly the government has to spend RM4.9 billion to implement efforts to deal with problems related to diabetes in the country.

According to the 2019 National Health and Morbidity Survey, it was found that the prevalence of diabetes among adults aged 18 and above increased from 11.2 percent in 2011 to 13.4 percent in 2015 and then rose to 18.3 percent in 2019.

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 in reducing the alarming increase of diabetes among Malaysians. According to WHO Malaysians ranked sixth among Asian countries with a 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 diabetes consumed the highest annual healthcare spending among the three chronic illnesses at 45.4 percent, compared to cardiovascular disease (CVD) at 40.7 percent and cancer at 13.9 percent. 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.

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 a 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 sugar consumption by reducing the intake of processed foods and drinks, especially soft drinks – which are also called “liquid candy” in the West.

With the alarming rate of diabetics among Malaysians the authorities should be serious in managing diabetes in the country or else the nation has 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:

- Impose a higher tax scale on restaurants serving fast food.
- 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-hour licenses to eating outlets

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