



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Letter to the Editor

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Public Housing Needs Urgent Reform to Prevent Social Decline

The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) is deeply concerned by the findings of Think City's recent [report](#), *From Roof to Resilience: A Social Assessment of Malaysia's Public Housing*, which highlights growing social and economic challenges within Malaysia's public housing communities.

Malaysia's public housing programme has been crucial in reducing urban poverty and improving access to basic amenities. However, the report suggests that while the country has largely succeeded in providing physical shelter, many public housing schemes are now struggling with deeper social issues that threaten residents' wellbeing and future prospects.

Based on surveys involving 2,884 households across ten public housing developments in the Klang Valley, the study found that more than 60 per cent of residents reported that their quality of life had either stagnated or deteriorated since the Covid-19 pandemic. Violent crime rates in the surveyed areas were reportedly seven times higher than the national average, while suicide rates were three times higher.

The report also found that many residents remain trapped in long-term economic vulnerability. Although some schemes were intended as temporary accommodation, more than 60 per cent of surveyed households had lived in their units for between ten and thirty years. This raises concerns that public housing is increasingly becoming a permanent destination rather than a pathway to better housing and greater economic mobility.

Particularly troubling are signs of concentrated poverty, weak governance and deteriorating communal spaces. Problems such as broken lifts, poor lighting, vandalism and neglected public areas not only affect living conditions but also contribute to insecurity, social isolation and declining community trust. Vulnerable groups, including children, women, older persons and persons with disabilities, are often the most affected.

The study also highlights the fragile financial position of many residents. More than half of surveyed households had savings sufficient for only one to three months, while nearly one-fifth had no savings at all. Many families depend on a single income earner and face increasing economic pressures.

CAP agrees that these challenges cannot be addressed through maintenance upgrades alone. Public housing policy must move beyond the provision of housing units and focus on building safe, resilient and inclusive communities.

We support stronger governance, clearer accountability and sustainable funding for housing management. Greater coordination among local authorities, housing agencies and other stakeholders is essential to improve standards and ensure long-term sustainability. Residents should also be empowered to participate more actively in managing their communities and communal spaces.

We further support the establishment of a high-level national task force to review and reform public housing policy. Such reforms should address not only housing quality but also social wellbeing, public safety and opportunities for upward mobility.

Public housing should provide more than shelter. It should offer residents dignity, security and the opportunity to build better lives. Without timely intervention, the social and economic costs of decline will become increasingly difficult and expensive to reverse.

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