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Press Statement **14 November 2026**

CAP: Diabetes the Silent Epidemic

Diabetes has reached epidemic proportions worldwide and remains a major public health concern, prompting the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) to declare November 14 as World Diabetes Day.

By 2050 the number of people living with diabetes is projected to reach 853 million, according to data by IDF. WHO estimates that more than 40% of people living with diabetes are undiagnosed. Hence, the theme for World Diabetes Day 2026 'Early action on diabetes' highlights the importance of earlier diagnosis, access to comprehensive care and reducing diabetes stigma.

Based on 2024 IDF statistics, the prevalence of diabetes among adults in Malaysia is 21.1%, meaning that more than one in five adults is living with the disease. Within Southeast Asia, Malaysia records the highest prevalence of diabetes, which rose from 11.2% in 2011 to 18.3% in 2019. This increase highlights an urgent need for more effective public health interventions.

Recent studies show that diabetes is no longer a disease affecting mainly older adults. A nationwide screening found that nearly one in five Malaysians aged 18 to 40 have elevated blood sugar levels, signaling prediabetes or diabetes.

Even more concerning is the rising incidence of Type 2 diabetes among young people. Reports indicate that cases are being detected in individuals as young as 14, which means longer disease duration and a higher risk of complications.

This is of concern as over time, high blood sugar due to diabetes can seriously affect every major organ system in the body, causing heart attacks, strokes, nerve damage, kidney failure, blindness, impotence and infections that can lead to amputations.

Living with diabetes can significantly affect quality of life. Beyond the burden of lifelong disease management, many people with diabetes face dietary restrictions, chronic pain, health complications, limitations on their daily activities and psychological challenges, including anxiety, depression, and concerns about future health outcomes.

The rising incidence of diabetes among young people is particularly worrying. It can limit their ability to fully participate in education, work, and other daily activities, affecting their well-being and future prospects. At the national level, this growing health burden may undermine productivity and economic development, as more individuals are affected during their most productive years.

Diabetes does not only take a toll on the nation's healthcare resources, but also on the limbs (amputation), eyesight (blindness), kidney (failure), heart (failure) and nerve (damage) of its sufferers.

As one of the world's fastest-growing health challenges, diabetes requires urgent action. Greater emphasis must be placed on prevention, early detection, uninterrupted diabetes care, and support diabetes risk reduction. Early intervention can save lives, improve health outcomes, and reduce the long-term burden on both individuals and the healthcare system.

Given the alarming increase in Malaysia's prevalence of diabetes, the Government must implement stronger and more comprehensive measures to stem this growing epidemic and protect the health and productivity of current and future generations.

The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) urges the Ministry of Health to take stronger and more comprehensive measures to curb the rising prevalence of diabetes by:

- Intensifying public education and awareness programmes on the health risks of obesity and diabetes.
- Discouraging the consumption of foods high in fat, sugar, salt, and harmful additives through appropriate fiscal measures, including taxes on unhealthy products.
- Ensuring adequate sports facilities and recreational amenities in residential areas to encourage physical activity.
- Prohibiting the sale of unhealthy foods and beverages through vending machines in hospitals, and other public institutions.
- Requiring mandatory labeling of fat content on all food products, including fast food items.
- Conducting sustained education campaigns targeting parents and children on the dangers of obesity, diabetes, and unhealthy dietary habits.

For consumers, Malaysia's diabetes epidemic is a crisis that affects almost every family. While the statistics are alarming, they should serve as a call to action rather than a cause for despair. Type 2 diabetes is largely preventable and manageable through greater awareness, early screening, healthy eating, physical activity, and effective consistent disease management.

Early detection is crucial, as diabetes often develops silently and may not present noticeable symptoms until serious complications and often irreversible damage may have already occurred. Early action remains the key to preventing complications, improving quality of life, and reducing the burden of diabetes on individuals, families, and the nation.

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