

Confiscation Of Unregistered Medicines: Time To Empower Health Education — Ahmad Mahfuz Gazali

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Most Malaysians are unaware of the consequences of health problems that may affect them.



Health Minister Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad recently reported that RM37.5 million unregistered medicines were confiscated last year.

This trend is worrying, as it marks an increase in confiscated unregistered medicines from 21,517 in 2024 to 20,157 in 2023. He presented this fact during the launch of the Reject Illegal Medicines Roadshow for Central Zone on May 3, 2025.

He added that almost 70 per cent of the confiscated unregistered medicines were sold online, making it more difficult for the Ministry of Health (MOH) to control the trend.

The rise in the sale of unregistered medicines online reflects an increase in the demand for these products, as most Malaysians may not know how to differentiate between registered and unregistered drugs in Malaysia.

In addition to using unregistered medicines, there has been a rise in vaccine hesitancy, as claimed by Dr Amirul Amzar.

Dr Amirul is the vice president of Medical Mythbusters Malaysia, an NGO of medical professionals that aims to eradicate medical misinformation among Malaysians.

In addition to Medical Mythbusters Malaysia's social media pages, the MOH has used its official portal to disseminate health information, namely KKM Portal MyHealth.

Despite the availability of various information on social media, most Malaysians are not taking care of their health.

According to the National Health Morbidity Survey (NHMS) 2023, 2.3 million adults in Malaysia live with three non-communicable diseases ((NCDs) such as diabetes, hypertension, and high cholesterol.

Furthermore, diabetes has been identified as one of the leading causes of death in Malaysia. Alarmingly, two in five adults are unaware of their diabetic status.

Most importantly, 84 per cent of young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 are unaware of their diabetic status.

Like diabetes, approximately 29.2 per cent of adults in Malaysia have hypertension, and 11.9 per cent are unaware of it.

Furthermore, more than half of Malaysian adults are overweight or obese.

Not taking care of their health is not an isolated issue affecting Malaysian adults.

A recent report revealed the rise in vaping among Malaysian teenagers.

Last year, 12,252 high school students were caught vaping, highlighting a worrying trend among youths in Malaysia.

In addition to physical health, mental health remains a massive problem among Malaysians.

According to NHMS 2023, depression in Malaysia has doubled since 2019, with nearly half having thoughts of self-harm or suicide.

It is most prevalent among those aged between 16 and 29. One in six children is also likely to suffer from mental health problems.

These public health problems may be attributed to the lack of understanding or misinformation about health among Malaysians.

Most Malaysians are unaware of the consequences of health problems that may affect them, which would either affect their quality of life or directly cause death.

Taking unregistered drugs, having non-communicable diseases or mental health problems, or vaping can directly affect Malaysians on a personal level.

On the other hand, managing health problems indirectly affects government spending, as the government heavily subsidises treatment for most issues in public clinics and hospitals.

Hence, the country's productivity may decrease in the future, given that most Malaysians affected by the problems are from the working age group.

Therefore, a new health education policy must be introduced to educate Malaysians about their health.

The policy that should be introduced must be founded on science-based evidence, which forms the cornerstone of modern medicine.

Under the administration of Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, the government is trying very hard to push AI to be part of the national agenda.

Given the importance of health education, similar efforts to promote AI should be replicated in health education.

Health education should be viewed as an investment, rather than a burden, in line with the National Health Literacy Policy launched in 2024.

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health education

non-communicable disease (NCDs)

unregistered medicines