



## **LOOK TO UK EXPERIENCE TO HELP MALAYSIA REDUCE ITS SMOKING PREVALENCE RATE**

***FPMPAM urges Government to hold engagement sessions with stakeholders & develop a stop-smoking framework***

**28 April 2023 (Kuala Lumpur)** – The Federation of Private Medical Practitioners' Associations Malaysia (FPMPAM), the national body representing doctors in private practice in Malaysia, today recommended Malaysia to consider the experience of the United Kingdom (UK) in its approach to reduce smoking prevalence there.

FPMPAM's comments come following the announcement that the UK government will be embarking on a world's-first 'swap to stop' scheme, which will provide one million smokers a vape starter kit alongside behavioural support to help them quit the habit. This was part of the UK government's move to meet its ambition of being smoke free by 2030 – reducing smoking rates to 5% or less.

**Dr Steven Chow, President of the Federation of Private Medical Practitioners Associations Malaysia (FPMPAM), said,** "The act of quitting for many smokers is not as simple as going cold turkey. For most, it is about replacing a habit that has become instinctive and natural. We have higher chances of getting smokers to quit if we give them a pathway that supports their psycho-social needs."

"The evidence has been there for many years that non-combustible nicotine products are less harmful than smoking and consecutive studies suggests that vaping is an effective alternative in quitting conventional cigarettes.<sup>1</sup> Putting systematic processes in place that leverages on the benefits of harm reduction strategies, such as the 'swap to stop' scheme, is a bold innovative approach to address a recalcitrant public health problem."

In Malaysia, there are approximately 5 million adults, aged 15 and over, who are current smokers<sup>2</sup>. Comparatively, in the UK, where harm reduction strategies are implemented, smoking prevalence has progressively decreased since 2011 where smoking prevalence stood at 20.2%. Latest statistics from 2021 show a smoking prevalence amongst adults aged 18 at 13.3%, the equivalent of around 6.6 million people.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.gov.uk/government/news/vaping-better-than-nicotine-replacement-therapy-for-stopping-smoking-evidence-suggests>

<sup>2</sup>National Health & Morbidity Survey 2015 by the Ministry of Health Malaysia

<sup>3</sup><https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/smoking-uk-number-lowest-level-b2239761.html>

FPMPAM also showed its support for the call by Former Chief Justice Tun Zaki Azmi<sup>4</sup> which "recommended that the government should look to countries like Japan, the UK, and New Zealand for guidance on how to regulate these products based on their risk profiles, with "cigarettes being the most harmful" and "vaping at the lower end" of the risk spectrum."

FPMPAM added that holistic collaborations between the government, medical practitioners in both public and private facilities, as well as harm reduction experts, is vital if Malaysia is serious about reducing its smoking levels.

"The correct understanding of harm reduction strategies, coupled with government interventions and behavioural support from medical practitioners and other healthcare professionals, is important if we want to reduce smoking incidences in Malaysia."

"FPMPAM urges the government to consult and engage with medical practitioners, harm reduction experts, and all other stakeholders to obtain diverse viewpoints. This can help the government in its steps to develop a framework, be it regulatory or medical, to drive Malaysia's goal of achieving a smoking prevalence of less than 5% by 2045," **Dr Steven** concluded.

FPMPAM will be embarking on a three-year campaign to educate and to empower private practitioners, other healthcare professionals and members of the public as key message ambassadors in their programme entitled, "Smoking: don't start, if you smoke, stop and if you can't, seek help".

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**About the Federation of Private Medical Practitioners Associations Malaysia (FPMPAM)**

Founded in 1989, it has more than 5,000 members in seven state-level associations in the country. While it is primarily committed to improving the quality of private healthcare through continuing medical education, continuing professional development of its members and ethics advocacy, it has in recent years been focusing on frontier medicine, addiction medicine and a mentoring programme for trainee doctors.

***For further information please contact:***

*Dr. Steven Chow,  
email:secretariat@fpmpam.org*

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<sup>4</sup> <https://codeblue.galencentre.org/2023/04/19/ex-chief-justice-zaki-calls-for-geg-separation-from-tobacco-bill/>