

Advancing Preventive Health in Malaysia



What is preventive health?

Prevention strategies enabled by the healthcare ecosystem, including policies, programs, and interventions that are delivered, facilitated, or implemented by various healthcare ecosystem players. The World Health Organization defines prevention as “approaches and activities aimed at reducing the likelihood that a disease or disorder will affect an individual, interrupting or slowing the progress of the disorder or reducing disability.”

Why should Malaysia focus on preventive health?

Facing a surge in noncommunicable diseases, COVID-19 aftershocks, and budget strains, Malaysia’s healthcare system is at a critical juncture. The Malaysian government’s **Health White Paper for Malaysia: Strengthening people’s health, future-proofing the nation’s health system** lays the foundation for a stronger health system that includes preventive health. To achieve these goals, it is important to assess the present state of preventive health holistically through a three-prong framework: *Policy, Interventions, and Financing*.

I. Policy Insights

Current Landscape:

Malaysia is strongly advancing prevention, and there are opportunities to make the efforts even more effective.



While Malaysia does not have a standalone preventive health strategy, it has integrated preventive health into its major health strategies, including maternal and child health, oral health, infectious diseases, noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), and pandemic preparedness.

Recommendations:

Embed a preventive health lens across all four pillars of Malaysia’s healthcare transformation:

- Integrate preventive health goals into all four pillars of Malaysia’s healthcare transformation.
- Ensure sustainable health financing mechanisms include coverage for preventive health interventions.

Develop financial and non-financial incentivization schemes for preventive health to stimulate preventive health behavior and care seeking:

- Implement financial incentives like tax rebates for gym memberships and subsidies for healthy foods.
- Introduce non-financial incentives such as community recognition programs and gamification strategies to encourage preventive health behaviors.



II. Access Insights

Current Landscape:

Public provision of primary healthcare, where preventive health largely takes place, is underinvested and overburdened:



Public clinics, which handle **64%** of outpatient visits, receive limited resources despite offering comprehensive preventive care.



Private clinics, making up **72%** of primary healthcare facilities, focus more on acute treatment.

Vaccination rates for children have been historically strong, but overall vaccine rates have declined across all age groups:



Overall vaccine uptake, including adult vaccination, has declined across age groups post-COVID-19.



Childhood immunization rates declined from 86.5% in 2016 to 83.5% in 2022, below the WHO benchmark of 90% by 2030.

While strong policies are in place, prevention, detection, and response mechanisms for pandemics and outbreaks need to be strengthened:



Existing policies like MYSED-II lack novel detection techniques and data modeling.



Fragmented laboratory network between public and private sectors.

Digital technologies for preventive health are underutilized and fragmented in use:



Limited implementation of digital tools for preventive health.



Weak database and modeling tools for surveillance.

Recommendations:

Explore and implement strategies that extend the preventive healthcare ecosystem beyond public sector health facilities.

- Partner with private health providers to relieve pressure on public clinics.
- Expand preventive health services to workplaces, schools, and community centers.
- Implement health education and screenings in workplaces and schools and task-shift basic health checkups to allied health or volunteer workers.

Accelerate the paradigm shift from “sick care” to “health care” by defining and promoting the provision of a core preventive health services package across the life-course.

- Develop a comprehensive package tailored to different age groups.
- Enhance uptake of vaccinations, screenings, and diagnostics.

Assess and accelerate the use of digital tools, where appropriate, to support preventive health service provision, uptake, and healthy behaviors.

- Enhance telemedicine applications and develop mobile-based preventive health tools.
- Integrate dietary habit tracking, glucose levels, and physical activity monitoring into the emerging EMR system.

Strengthen pandemic preparedness infrastructure to detect and prevent future outbreaks.

- Foster cohesion between public and private laboratories.
- Integrate novel tools like data modeling for better outbreak detection.
- Develop strategic stockpiles and robust supply chain infrastructure.

III. Financing Insights

Current Landscape:

Malaysia offers a variety of financial schemes to bridge gaps in access for low-income populations that can be used toward preventive health.



Subsidized or free preventive health services through community clinics.



National Immunization Program includes HPV, PCV, and other vaccinations.



Screening tests for diabetes, hypertension, and women cancers available at low or no cost.

Recommendations:

Define, reimburse, or offer a low cost or free well-defined package of preventive health services in the public and private primary care facilities.

- Offer a comprehensive preventive health package for B40 and M40 income groups and ensure coverage in both public and private sectors.

Ringfence dedicated budget for preventive health.

- Allocate a specific percentage of the annual healthcare budget exclusively for preventive health programs.
- Use health economics and outcomes data to justify the budget allocation.
- Explore alternative financing mechanisms like public-private partnerships.



Healthcare systems today are at a crossroads. For Malaysia to ensure sustainability of its healthcare system, a preventive health approach is no longer optional; it’s a necessity.

Read our full report, *Advancing Preventive Health in Southeast Asia: Recommendations for Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam*

