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Gala to channel money collected towards setting up of halfway home in Kuching

KUCHING

THE Malaysian AIDS Foundation (MAF) will present its Kuching Gala next month to raise funds for the state's first one-stop healthcare centre for integrated HIV treatment, care and support.

The idea for the centre came about in response to the barriers faced by people in rural and interior Sarawak in accessing free HIV healthcare services provided by the government and NGOs.

Located in Kuching, the proposed community healthcare centre will serve as a halfway home linked to the Sarawak General Hospital and provide HIV/AIDS-related care such as community-based HIV testing, counselling, treatment literacy and legal and welfare service referrals.

It will be run by the Sarawak AIDS Concern Society, a partner organisation of the Malaysian AIDS Council.

Sarawak began recording HIV cases in 1989, three years after the first case in Malaysia was notified. As of last December, it had accumulated 2,178 HIV infections, 480 of which resulted in AIDS-related deaths.

The current HIV notification rate in Sarawak stands at 8.7 per 100,000 persons, lower than the national average of 10.9 per 100,000 persons.

However, new HIV infections in the state have been on the rise in the past five years, with as many as 230 new cases recorded last year compared to 169 in 2011.

"What the figures fail to capture is the harsh reality of battling the negative social impact of HIV and AIDS," said MAF chairman Prof Datuk Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman.

She said stigma continued to fuel the AIDS epidemic, the burden of which was felt most by women and children, pushing them to society's margins away from lifesaving HIV and AIDS health services.

"The situation in Sarawak is compounded by the diversity of its geographical features that impede access to these otherwise readily available services.

"Our mission is to ensure that no one is left behind. The one-stop healthcare centre is only the beginning of our commitment to closing the gap and strengthening the state-led AIDS response.

"Given that the number of infections in the state is relatively small, there is a real opportunity to end AIDS here in Sarawak, ahead of all the other states in Malaysia," she added.

Held under the patronage of the Chief Minister's wife Puan Sri Jamilah Anu, the MAF Kuching Gala is expected to attract 1,000 guests.

The event will be attended by MAF's celebrity supporters Aaron Aziz, Bob Yusof, Dayang Nurfaizah, Dee (of Jangan Ketawa fame), Fahrin Ahmad and Ziana Zain, featuring special performances, auctions and fine dining.

Jointly organised by the state government in partnership with the Sarawak AIDS Concern Society, the event will take place at Borneo Convention Centre Kuching on Dec 8.

Tables priced from RM2,500 to RM25,000 are now available. For reservations and enquiries, call MAF at 012-959 4596 (Arif) or 019-441 3577 (Hafsah).

Concert-only tickets priced at RM60 are also available at www.ticketpro.com.my.