

Headline	State to have its first one-stop healthcare centre for HIV next year		
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State to have its first one-stop healthcare centre for HIV next year

KUCHING: Sarawak will have its first One-Stop Healthcare Centre for Integrated HIV Treatment, Care and Support next year.

Malaysia AIDS Foundation (MAF) Kuching Gala patron Datin Patinggi Datuk Amar Jamilah Anu, the wife of the Chief Minister, said the centre at Crookshank Road would be close to Sarawak General Hospital (SGH).

“This is the way forward in addressing HIV and AIDS related issues affecting our men, women and children. We intend to link the facility with all the HIV and AIDS health services provided by SGH,” she said during the gala on Thursday, which raised RM550,000 for the centre.

Sarawak AIDS Concern Society (SACC) will operate the centre, which will offer temporary or short-term refuge, particularly for patients who have to travel very long distances across the state to receive free HIV treatment, tests and follow-ups.

“It will also serve as a community empowerment centre, providing psycho-social support and other life affirming activities that will have a positive impact on their health and wellbeing as

well as livelihood skills training to help alleviate poverty,” said Jamilah.

She said the centre would set in motion a plan of action to make Sarawak a zero HIV/AIDS state by 2030, in line with the national objective. It will cost RM800,000 to renovate and refurbish the old government quarters to be used for the centre and another RM100,000 annually to sustain its operations.

She noted that while the fight to reduce new HIV infections had seen tremendous progress nationwide, attitudes, beliefs, practices and policies continued to stigmatise and discriminate against HIV/AIDS patients.

“The situation is no different in Sarawak. This is further compounded by limited access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services that are otherwise readily available at the SGH or NGOs such as SACC in Kuching here,” she said.

From 1989 until 2015, there were 2,178 HIV infections – 480 of which resulted in AIDS-related deaths.

The current HIV notification

rate in Sarawak stood at 8.7 per 100,000 persons – lower than the national average of 10.9 per 100,000 persons.

“However, the rising trend of new HIV infections in the past five years – from 169 cases in 2011 to 230 last year – is of great concern,” said Jamilah.

“Over 90 percent were attributed to sexual transmissions. This situation makes women and girls as equally, if not more, vulnerable to HIV as men. For many of these women, their only risk factor for HIV is being married.”

Jamilah stressed the need for an urgent multi-sectoral response.

“If the situation is allowed to continue, not only will it be undermining the gains we have made so far in the national AIDS response but also run the risk of the epidemic rebounding dramatically.”

Among the donors to MAF were the Chief Minister’s Department (RM50,000), as well as Yayasan Sarawak, Berjaya Corporation Sdn Bhd, Sapura Kencana Petroleum, Datin Hamidah Omar, Musyati Sdn Bhd, Delta-Peita Sebakong Sdn Bhd and Vital Focus Group, which donated RM25,000 each.