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NEW MEASURES TO CURB HIV WELCOME

THE Malaysian AIDS Council welcomes the Ministry of Health's proposal to introduce new measures to stem the rising number of sexually-transmitted HIV infections.

In a recent statement published in this newspaper (headlined, 'Free HIV screenings in clinics'), the Ministry outlined two programmes to be undertaken in a bid to reduce sexual transmission of HIV by 30 per cent in five years: the provision of free HIV screening tests at 1Malaysia clinics and formation of the National Task Force on Mitigation of Sexual Transmission of HIV/AIDS.

MAC President Datuk Dr Raj Karim (picture) said: "We applaud the Ministry of Health for its efforts in spearheading the response to sexual transmission of HIV, in much the same way it did when introducing the Harm Reduction

programme for injecting drug users in 2006. Sex is a decidedly more complex issue compared to drugs, and while it remains a highly taboo subject in our society, we are pleased to see that the Ministry is addressing it head-on."

With sexual transmission accounting for more than 64 per cent of new HIV infections in 2012, which is double the figure reported five years prior, the National Task Force is indeed timely and a step in the right direction.

MAC also supports the proposal to introduce free HIV screenings at 1Malaysia clinics and to provide the services after hours.

According to Dr Raj, such considerations will have a positive impact on the uptake of HIV testing services, provided that the HIV tests are conducted in a manner that protects the anonymity and



confidentiality of clients, that they are given pre- and post-test counselling and direct those tested positive to appropriate HIV treatment, care and support services.