

Headline	Funding for HIV-related social work not cut		
MediaTitle	Sunday Star		
Date	27 May 2012	Color	Black/white
Section	Nation	Circulation	320,964
Page No	14	Readership	1,072,000
Language	English	ArticleSize	151 cm ²
Journalist	N/A	AdValue	RM 3,332
Frequency	Weekly	PR Value	RM 9,996



Funding for HIV-related social work ‘not cut’

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Health Ministry has denied that its allocation for HIV-related social work was reduced, as claimed by certain parties.

Its deputy director-general Datuk Dr Lokman Hakim Sulaiman said the funds distributed to the NGOs involved in such work annually remained the same over the past few years.

“We disburse the funds according to how they perform.

“This is done when they submit their annual reports and proposals to ask for funding,” he said after opening the 11th biennial general meeting of the Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) here.

Dr Lokman noted that some NGOs had yet to submit their reports.

According to the ministry, RM5.3mil had been approved

through the MAC to support NGO activities this year, compared with last year’s RM5.35mil.

However, MAC reported that only RM100,000 of the fund would be channelled to HIV prevention programmes for sex workers and transgenders, even when sexual transmission had just recently surpassed injecting drug use as the most common cause of HIV transmission in the country.

This, the council said in an earlier statement, had led to a significant funding reduction for the sex workers and transgenders programme as it received only RM835,000 in 2011.

“As a result of this budget cut, these programmes will no longer be operational,” said the council.

Meanwhile, the Malaysian AIDS Foundation had allocated RM980,000 to help NGOs continue projects which did not receive the ministry’s funding for this year, said its chairman Prof Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman

(who is also a MAC exco).

Newly-elected MAC president Datuk Dr Raj Karim said that funding for HIV-related programmes was a “bottomless pit” and the council was dependant solely on the Government for it.

She also said that the strategy for the new MAC exco would focus on curbing the sexual transmission of HIV while continuing the programmes already in place for injecting drug users.

Dr Raj replaced Tan Sri Mohd Zaman Khan, a former Prisons Department director-general, as president after his two-year term.

Dr Raj is a former regional director of the International Planned Parenthood Federation for the East and South-East Asia and Oceania Region.

She was also the former director-general of the National Population and Family Development Board.