

Over 13,000 new nurses by 2030, says Minister

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Dzulkefly hands over a diploma to a graduate.

KOTA KINABALU: The Health Ministry (MOH) is set to expand nurse training capacity, widen career development opportunities and streamline recruitment as part of a major reform of the country’s healthcare workforce.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said the reforms were necessary to address the critical shortage of nursing personnel, with 10,557 vacancies currently recorded among 73,281 Grade U5 nursing posts nationwide.

He said the ministry’s first strategy was to increase the production of nurses, with trainee intake already doubled to 3,000 a year from 2025.

“MOH is targeting the production of 13,345 MOH Training Institute (ILKKM) graduates by 2030 and plans to outsource up to 2,000 trainee places annually to public and private higher education institutions,” he said at the ILKKM Convocation Ceremony for the Sabah Zone held at University Malaysia Sabah.

“By October 2027, we will reopen four branches in Kuantan, Kuala Terengganu, Muar and Penang, with an additional capacity of 500 trainees each year,” he said, adding that this would bring the overall capacity of the Diploma in Nursing programme to 5,500 trainees annually.

Dzulkefly said the second strategy would focus on expanding career pathways, with 15 On-The-Job Training (OJT) programmes beginning in September 2026, allowing healthcare personnel to enhance their expertise without having to leave their workplaces for extended periods.

“We will also expand the pathway for Community Nurses to become Nurses through the Transition Diploma,” he added.

Under the third strategy, MOH will implement direct recruitment and greater staffing autonomy, following approval by the Public Service Department (JPA) to exempt ILKKM Diploma in Nursing graduates from Interim Contract Appointments.

“Graduates who pass and register with the Malaysian Nursing Board would be absorbed directly into permanent positions,” he explained, noting that MOH’s new autonomy will allow it to reduce bureaucracy and place graduates directly in healthcare facilities.

He said the reforms were being driven by the Nursing Strategic Plan 2026–2036, launched on 9 June with 17 strategies and 44 initiatives, as MOH moved from plans on paper towards concrete action to strengthen the healthcare workforce.

Dzulkefly said the reforms were particularly important as Malaysia faced an ageing population and a growing burden of non-communicable diseases, noting that by 2036, at least 15pc of Malaysians are expected to be aged 60 and above.

“At the same time, non-communicable diseases continue to drive premature deaths, accounting for 72pc of such deaths and imposing an estimated RM64.2 billion annual economic burden on the country,” he stressed, highlighting the importance of the reform and providing better healthcare services to meet public demands.

The ILKKM convocation saw a total of 6,897 graduates receive their scrolls, with 924 graduates making up the Sabah Zone, alongside 5,117 graduates in the Peninsular Zone and 946 in Sarawak.

He also highlighted Sabah’s growing contribution to the healthcare workforce, with the State recording 9,442 registered trained nurses, while applications from Sabah youths to join ILKKM increased by 18.8pc from the previous year.

Dzulkefly called on all graduates to uphold the dignity of the profession and serve with compassion as they begin their careers, in line with the spirit of “One Shared Trust, Health for All.”

“Through serving patients, difficult responsibilities would eventually be transformed into a sense of love and purpose.

“This represents the true spirit of a healthcare warrior — serving with commitment, compassion and a sense of responsibility to the people,” he concluded.