

Sabah Heart Centre given top priority, Dzulkefly concedes staffing shortage remains a challenge



Construction of the RM125 million Sabah Heart Centre is expected to begin in the third quarter of 2027 with the facility targeted for completion and operation by the third quarter of 2029, Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said today. — Picture by Julia Chan

Summary

- The RM125 million Sabah Heart Centre project, approved under the 13th Malaysia Plan, is slated to start construction in the third quarter of 2027 and become operational by the third quarter of 2029.
- Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Dzulkefly Ahmad emphasized the prioritization of this project, addressing Sabah's health service shortages, including increasing cardiology specialists.
- To improve staffing, the ministry is working with the Public Service Department (JPA) and has initiated specialist training programs.
- Additionally, healthcare resource allocation for Sabah is expected to rise by five percent annually, aiming to reach RM4 billion by 2030, as part of negotiations related to the Malaysia Agreement 1963.

By Julia Chan
First Published: Monday, 17 Aug 2026 3:45 PM MYT

KOTA KINABALU, Aug 17 — Construction of the RM125 million Sabah Heart Centre is expected to begin in the third quarter of next year, with the facility targeted for completion and operation by the third quarter of 2029, Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said today.

He said the project, approved under the 13th Malaysia Plan’s first rolling plan for 2026, is currently undergoing preliminary works, including the procurement of material testing services which are expected to be completed this month.

“If everything goes according to plan without disruption, we hope to start in the third quarter of 2027. With a 24-month or two-year construction period, the Sabah Heart Centre should be operational by the third quarter of 2029,” he told reporters today.

He was here chairing the first 2026 Joint Action Committee Meeting on Sabah Health Development with the state’s women, health and people’s wellbeing minister Datuk Julita Mojungki.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim had announced the establishment of the heart centre in 2024 with at least three specialists to manage Sabah’s perennial health services shortage.

The project is among seven new health projects approved for Sabah under RMK-13 Rolling Plan 1, which has allocated RM1.57 billion for 53 health projects in the state, including 46 ongoing projects and seven new projects.

Dzulkefly said the Heart Centre would be given top priority by the Health Ministry, with the RM125 million allocation covering the overall project, including upgrading works, equipment procurement and related preliminary works.

It is understood that the current plan is to have the centre within the Queen Elizabeth II hospital, although it was previously reported that four hectares or 10 acres of land near University Malaysia Sabah had been identified and allocated for this purpose.

Asked whether the ministry would have enough specialists to staff the new centre when it opens, Dzulkefly acknowledged that human resources remained one of the ministry’s biggest longstanding challenges.

He said the ministry was working with the Public Service Department (JPA) to address shortages, including reducing bureaucratic delays in the appointment and placement of doctors.

“Human resources is my biggest legacy problem,” he said, adding that the ministry had now been given greater authority by JPA to manage the distribution of posts under its various service schemes.

He said several doctors were also currently undergoing specialist training and would eventually enter a period of supervised experience before being fully recognised as specialists.

“So, when the Sabah Heart Centre begins operations, I am confident we will be able to plan properly and increase the number of cardiology specialists,” he said.

The issue is particularly relevant to Sabah, where specialist services, including cardiology, remain limited and the National Heart Institute (IJN) Sabah currently has only one cardiologist serving the state, according to questions raised during the press conference.

Dzulkefly said the ministry would work to ensure the specialist pipeline was strengthened ahead of the centre’s opening.

Meanwhile, Dzulkefly also announced that the ministry opened up 607 new positions in Sabah as of August 1, including 355 management and professional posts, comprising 77 specialist positions and 203 medical, dental and pharmacy officers, as well as 252 posts for the implementing group.

The ministry has also set a target for Sabah’s annual health allocation to increase by five per cent, with the allocation projected to reach RM4 billion by 2030.

Dzulkefly said these measures formed part of ongoing discussions between the Federal and Sabah governments on healthcare-related claims under the Malaysia Agreement 1963 (MA63), with five subcommittees examining issues including health autonomy, powers and authority, legal rights, overlapping jurisdictions, staffing, training, facilities and regulation.