

# 'Set up fund to study emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases'

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Childcare centres, schools and universities are rooting for a bigger budget next year to reinvigorate the education sector and boost scientific research proficiency. - NSTP/MAHZIR MAT ISA

KUALA LUMPUR: Childcare centres, schools and universities are rooting for a bigger budget next year to reinvigorate the education sector and boost scientific research proficiency.

Universiti Putra Malaysia epidemiologist and biostatistics expert Associate Professor Dr Malina Osman proposed a special fund be set up to research emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases.

"The Health Ministry should have satellite research laboratories at all local research universities for continuous research and surveillance activities.

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"Each university should be given the specific type of infectious diseases that they can work on, with the continuous support of real clinical data from government and private hospitals.

"We have been facing the threat of emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases for two to three decades now.

"The Covid-19 pandemic is a wake-up call for the government to initiate enhanced collaborative researches

Universiti Malaysia Sabah Vice-Chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Taufiq Yap Yun Hin hoped for the government to dole out more general research funds for public universities.

"The government should allocate research funds of at least RM6 million to RM10 million for each public university in the 2021 Budget.

"This will help non-research universities to develop their research reputation and increase rankings."

Taufiq also said public universities should receive sufficient allocations to upgrade their information and communications technology infrastructure to deliver online teaching and learning effectively.

"Rural areas in Sabah and Sarawak require more funding to increase and improve their Internet connection.

"This will also allow students in these areas to follow their lessons properly.

"UMS will certainly welcome more funding for graduate upskilling and entrepreneurship-related training, as well as to prepare graduates for self-employment and the new job market."

E-Bridge Pre-School managing director Patrick Tiah urged the government to subsidise childcare for working parents and extend wage subsidies to childcare centres.

"Childcare subsidy for working parents will encourage workers, especially the mothers, to go back to work so that they can boost household income and contribute to rebuilding the economy.

"Besides that, extending wage subsidies to the childcare sector is vital since the sector relies mostly on female workers."

National Union of the Teaching Profession secretary-general Harry Tan hoped the 2021 Budget would allocate more funds to support online teaching for schools.

"We are hoping to see more financial assistance to support online teaching and teaching aid like e-books.

"We would also welcome more allocation for maintenance of schools, as well as for co-curricular activities."

Malaysia Youth Council vice-president Mohammad Izzat Afifi Abdul Hamid suggested that more cash aid and book vouchers be provided to undergraduates.

"The government should provide a one-off cash assistance of RM250 for undergraduates under the 2021 Budget to help them cope with the rising cost of living and economic uncertainty.

"Students should also be given book vouchers to purchase reference books.

Izzat also proposed that undergraduates be exempted from paying fees for co-curriculum activities and campus facilities since the universities were conducting online teaching and learning.