



INTERNATIONAL  
LONG TERM CARE  
POLICY NETWORK

# The Long Term Care COVID-19 Situation in Malaysia

**Kejal Hasmuk, Hakimah Sallehuddin, Maw Pin Tan, Wee Kooi Cheah, Rahimah Ibrahim, Sen Tyng Chai**

Last updated 2 October 2020

## **Authors**

Kejal Hasmuk, Department of Medicine, University of Malaya Medical Centre; Hakimah Sallehuddin, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM); Maw Pin Tan, Faculty of Medicine, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur; Wee Kooi Cheah, Taiping Hospital, Ipoh; Rahimah Ibrahim, Malaysian Research Institute on Ageing (MyAgeing), UPM; Sen Tyng Chai, MyAgeing, UPM

## **Itccovid.org**

This document is available through the website [Itccovid.org](http://Itccovid.org), which was set up in March 2020 as a rapidly shared collection of resources for community and institution-based long-term care responses to Covid-19. The website is hosted by CPEC at the London School of Economics and Political Science and draws on the resources of the International Long Term Care Policy Network.

Corrections and comments are welcome at [info@Itccovid.org](mailto:info@Itccovid.org). This document was last updated on 2 October 2020 and may be subject to revision.

**Copyright:** © 2020 The Authors. This is an open-access document distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported International License (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>.

## **Suggested citation**

Hasmuk K, Sallehuddin H, Tan MP, Cheah WK, Rahimah I, Chai ST (2020) The Long-Term Care COVID-19 Situation in Malaysia available at [LTCcovid.org](http://LTCcovid.org), International Long-Term Care Policy Network, CPEC-LSE, 2 October 2020.

## **Follow us on Twitter**

@mawptan @act4um

## **Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to thank the Interim Guideline Development Group and the Societies and Organizations involved with the development of the Interim Guidelines to raise awareness on COVID-19 in care homes among aged care operators, the general public as well as government agencies.

## 1. Key points

- Malaysia has ten federal-funded homes for older people and two homes for people who are chronically ill in Peninsular Malaysia, five state-funded homes for older people in East Malaysia, and a number of Islamic care homes operated and/or supported by State religious authorities.
- There are about 320 residential aged care facilities registered under the Department of Social Welfare (Act 506) and 26 nursing homes registered under the Ministry of Health (Act 586). The number of unregistered facilities numbers from 700 to over 1000, depending on estimation method and definition used.
- Community and home-based long-term care are currently unregulated in Malaysia.
- Department of Social Welfare and Ministry of Health (MOH) officials work closely with academics, care home representatives and civil society groups to reach out to care home providers.
- Malaysia has adopted a mass-testing strategy for all registered and unregistered care homes since April 2020. The nation-wide care home screening has halted since 31<sup>st</sup> July 2020 with the last report of total 16 425 screened (staff and residents), 47 detected positive (0.3%) of which 36 (76.6%) were asymptomatic.
- Previously, two older persons clusters have been reported (and closed) which involved at least two care homes in Klang and Petaling Jaya, resulting in 36 infections and five deaths. A further care home cluster (now closed) had emerged on 22 June, with eight cases involving both residents and staff. There have been no new deaths reported involving this cluster. Another nursing home cluster (now closed) had reported one death and eight other cases involving staff and residents. As such, a total of 4 known care homes have had cases detected/clusters. However, within the nationwide mass screening that detected another 47 cases, the number of care homes affected is not known.
- As part of “soft landing” and mitigation plans, Malaysia moved from Movement Control Order (18<sup>th</sup> March 2020 – 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2020) to Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO) (4<sup>th</sup> May – 9<sup>th</sup> June 2020) to Recovery Movement Control Order (RMCO) (10<sup>th</sup> June 2020- supposedly 31<sup>st</sup> August 2020, but was later extended till 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020). To date (2<sup>nd</sup> October), there are 24 active clusters, none of them involving care homes. The last reported care home cluster ended on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2020. That cluster involved 8 individuals (staff and residents), with no deaths.
- With the RMCO being implemented, many care homes have now moved towards taking in new residents and people discharged from hospitals – a much needed move to sustain the care homes. With the guidelines adopted by MOH, every patient discharged to a care home would first be tested for COVID. In addition, most nursing homes have also adapted to the best of their ability and capacity the Interim Recommendations to practice standard infection control measures for new residents admitted to care homes, especially those with respiratory symptoms.
- Care homes lack basic PPE and have difficulty observing physical distancing within their confined spaces.

- The industry body proposed a ‘No visitors’ policy and care homes are discouraged from admitting any new residents.
- Care home residents with suspected COVID-19 will be admitted to COVID hospitals, with all other residents admitted for isolation and testing if necessary.
- The MOH have also recently mandated that older persons to be discharged to an care facility to be tested for COVID-19.

## 2. Introduction

This is a preliminary report on the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable older Malaysians residing in long term care facilities (LTCF) such as Care Homes (CH) and/or Nursing Homes (NH). This provides an overview of key events and measures introduced at the national level, and responses by key / relevant stakeholders as well as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). In Malaysia the very first case of COVID-19 (imported) was reported on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2020 involving three Chinese tourists who entered Malaysia via Johor. On March 11<sup>th</sup> Malaysia then confirmed its first sporadic case of Covid-19 in the community [1].

Based on the population clock at the time of reporting, Malaysia’s population stands at 32,760,472 [2]. As of July 2019, it was estimated that the share of the Malaysian population aged 65 years or over was 6.7%. The National Policy for Older Persons (2011) defines an older person as an individual aged 60 years or over. Malaysia is currently facing the prospect of a rapidly ageing population, and the latest statistical data predicted this to be happening as soon as 2030 [3]. With this pandemic largely affecting the vulnerable groups – older persons and those with chronic medical conditions, this report is indeed timely.

The Crisis Preparedness and Response Centre (CPRC) which was established under the 9th Malaysia Plan (2005 – 2010) as part of the overall strategies in preparedness of effective management of disasters, outbreaks, crises and emergencies related to health has played a vital role in the coordination of care and dissemination of information to the relevant stake holders as well as public [4]. The CPRC is placed under the Surveillance Section of the Disease Control Division, Ministry of Health Malaysia. During this current COVID-19 pandemic, CPRC has been operating 24 hours a day for the last 4 months, anticipating the worst while taking major steps to “flatten the curve”.

The Director General of Health provides a press conference which is live streamed on social media at 5.00pm (GMT+8). Daily reports of confirmed new cases, number of deaths if any and total number of discharges from recover is provided during this press conference. Details of

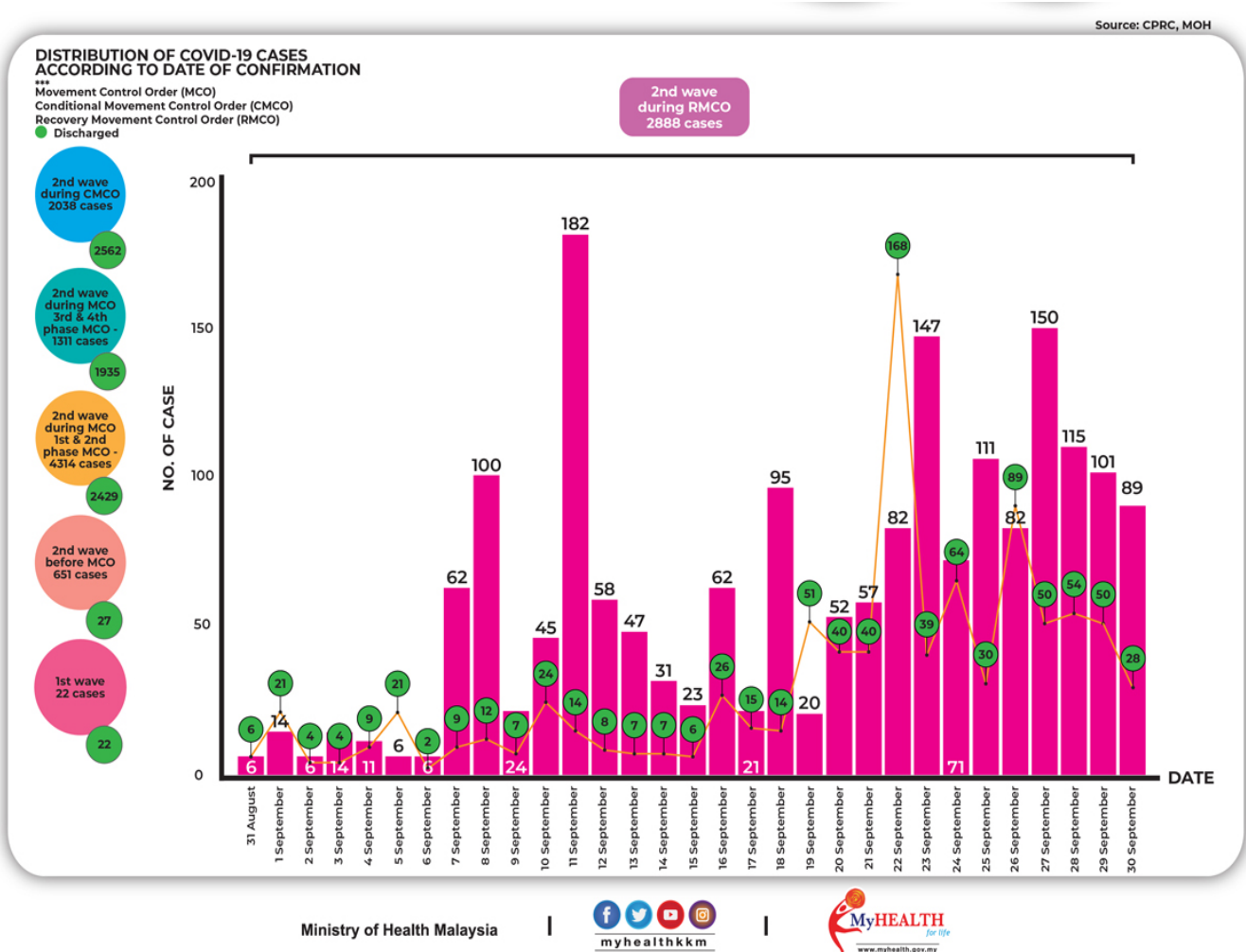
all deaths are provided at this briefing together with the clusters the new cases are linked to. Updates of new cases in active clusters are also provided [5].

### 3. Impact of COVID19 on long-term care users and staff so far

#### 3.1. Number of positive cases in population and deaths

As of 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020, there had been a total of 11,224 confirmed cases of SARS-CoV-2 infection in Malaysia, 136 deaths (1.21%) and 1,124 active cases still receiving treatment. The number of active cases has been on the rise in the last 3 weeks especially with the recent elections in Sabah with voters travelling as well as community spread. Please refer to Figure 1 for the number of cumulative and daily cases, recoveries and deaths.

Figure 1. COVID-19 Statistics, Malaysia.



Source : CPRC, MOH

### **3.2. Rates of infection and mortality among long-term care users and staff**

The exact number of affected long-term care users and staff is not publicly available, details of each outbreak known to the authors at the time this report was produced, have been withheld due to concerns about medicolegal implications. The Ministry of Health of Malaysia had reported an Older Person Cluster (Kluster Warga Emas) with Care Centres that resulted in 36 infected individuals and five deaths, located within the Petaling and Klang districts in the state of Selangor [6]. It has not been officially revealed whether all 36 affected individuals were care home residents or staff. Informal, unconfirmed sources suggested that two of the cases who died were from a single care home, and one death was from another care home. Five members of staff and three other residents also tested positive from the same facility. The source of infection was from the discharge of a resident from hospital. The other confirmed cases and deaths within the cluster are therefore likely to be patients and staff from the hospital outbreak and their close contacts. All five deaths from that single cluster were of older adults who were frail with multiple comorbidities. A cluster involving a care home (Kluang Old-Folks Home) emerged on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2020. It started with a 72 year old resident with underlying stroke and hypertension, who had fever and cough since 10<sup>th</sup> July 2020. He was brought to the emergency department (ED) on 17<sup>th</sup> July and died upon arrival to ED. He was later found to be positive for COVID-19. Up to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2020, 62 staff and residents of the care home had been screened. Eighteen were found to be positive for COVID-19. It is believed that the infection was brought into the care home by a visitor who just came back from overseas [7]. Another cluster from a care home in Kuala Selangor, reported eight cases (staff and residents) and here it is suspected that the infection was brought in by a member of staff.

Until the 2 October, there is a total of four care homes known to have COVID-19 cases with a total of 37 individuals (staff and residents) affected and four deaths (10.8% of cases in care homes, and 2.9% of all deaths in the country). These figures do not appear to include those detected through MOH screening.

Screening activities started on 4 May 2020. However, this has stopped since 31<sup>st</sup> July 2020 with the last report of total 16,425 screened (staffs and residents), 47 detected positive (0.3%), of which 36 (76.6%) were asymptomatic. As the infectivity of asymptomatic carriers may be weak and the risks are debatable at this point, evidence seems to suggest much is still unknown about the spread of COVID-19 in the community. Mass screening at residential long-term care facilities in Malaysia has only been planned as a once-off event, with no clear plans for future surveillance.

### **3.3. Population level measures to contain spread of COVID-19**

Malaysia has adopted an aggressive stance toward containment of any spread of COVID-19. While self-isolation was used as a strategy for those who have travelled abroad, positive cases arising from those who returned from abroad has led to the government setting up quarantine facilities, including the repurposing of hotels for this effort. All returned citizens were swab tested

on arrival at these quarantine facilities and are only discharged after negative tests on the 14<sup>th</sup> day.

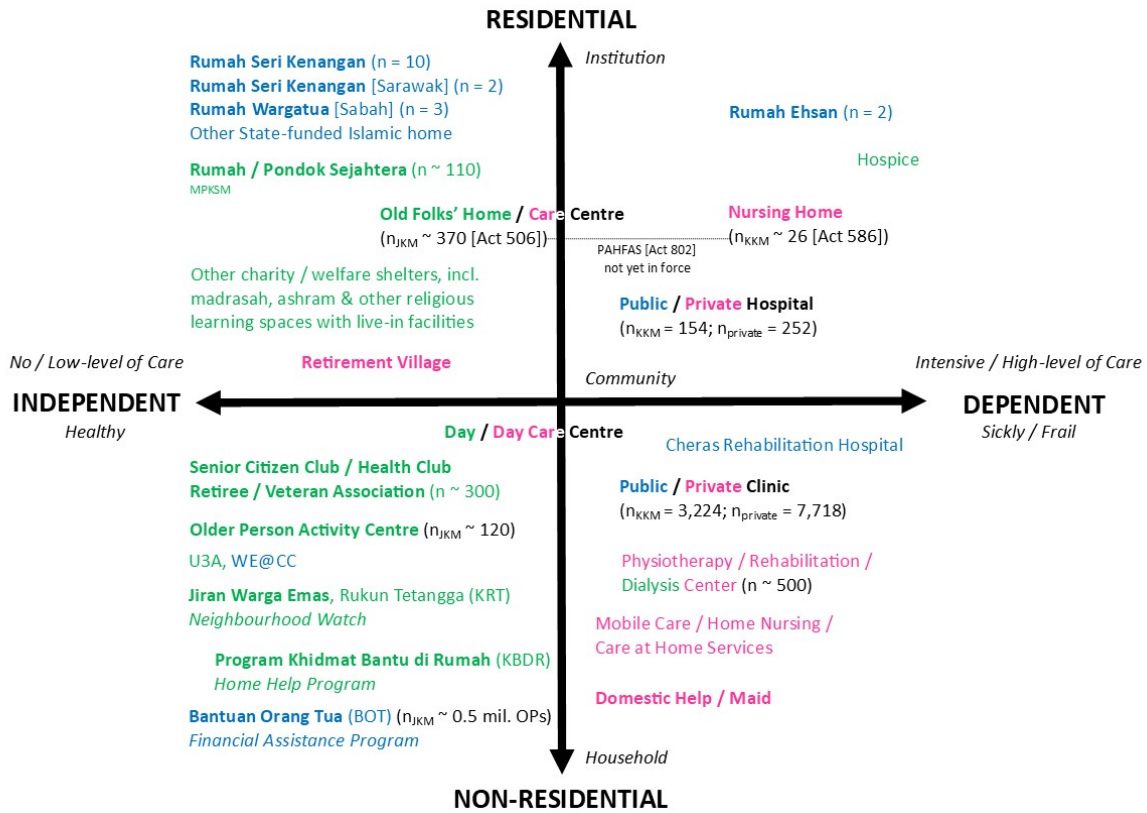
All people who are ill with COVID-19 are cared for in COVID hospitals for at least up to day seven of illness, after which those with mild or no symptoms are moved to makeshift hospitals and only discharged after successive negative tests. After the news of the transmission of SARS-CoV-2 at a mass gathering in a mosque in Seri Petaling, Kuala Lumpur [10], a Movement Control Order (MCO) was imposed nationwide and has been in operation since 18 March 2020. The Movement Control Order was extended thrice on 1 April (Phase 2), 15 April (Phase 3) and 29 April (Phase 4), followed by a Conditional Movement Control Order on 4 May. Schools, universities and businesses where social distancing are considered challenging remain closed [11].

Malaysia has now entered the 4th phase of MCO which is the Recovery Movement Control Order on 10th June 2020 where all businesses are allowed to operate under strict Standard Operating Procedures clearly set out by the National Safety Council. All interstate travel is also allowed. Students are coming back to universities and schools in stages, with postgraduate students resuming their research activities in laboratories and students sitting for public examinations and equivalent international school examinations this year were given priorities. There are still no guidelines released on community day care centre activities for older adults.

#### **4. Brief background to the long-term care system**

Malaysia has 15 government-run residential homes and 2 government-run homes for people who are terminally ill. There are an additional 320 registered long-term care facilities in Malaysia, which at present are either registered with the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (or the Welfare Department) under the Care Centre Act (Act 506), or the Ministry of Health under the Private Healthcare Facilities Act (Act 586). As of this year, all long-term care facilities will be registered under the new Private Aged Care Facilities Act 2018 (Act 802) which will be enforced in 2020 by the Ministry of Health. Over 1,000 long-term care facilities in Malaysia, however, remain unregistered [12]. The projected number of unregistered facilities, which ranges from 700 to 1,000, depends on the estimation method used and may vary due to the lack of a clear definition and classification of aged care facilities. Applying this estimation, residential facilities serve approximately less than 1 percent of the older population, which points to the central role of families in providing long-term care. Please refer to Figure 2 for a conceptualization of the long-term care system in Malaysia.

Figure 2. Aged Care System in Malaysia



Source: MyAgeing, UPM

Most long-term care facilities offer residential or nursing care, and apart from the handful of government-funded beds, are primarily operated by non-governmental organizations (NGO), religious organizations or private operators. Non-governmental organizations tend to only operate residential homes and lack the resources to care for those who require nursing-level care. Nursing homes are, therefore, primarily privately run. A handful of day-care facilities are beginning to emerge, and these are mainly privately run. Most of these residential care facilities are found in the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia, particularly in urban centres [13], which lead to accessibility and affordability issues for rural and lower income families.

Home care is usually provided by foreign domestic workers/helpers, called 'maids' who are engaged through agencies from mainly Indonesia, Philippines, Cambodia and Sri Lanka [14]. Home nursing services are usually contracted for a minimum of 8 hours a day, with many families opting for 24-hour nursing care, which is usually provided by a team for five local part-time nurses to supplement their regular income or two full-time time nurses either from Malaysia or the Philippines. The new Private Aged Care Facilities Act does not mention home-based care, which therefore remains unregulated. In addition, the Malaysian Welfare Department also introduced a Home Help programme to assist older persons living in the community with tasks such as shopping, financial transactions or just companionship. The volunteers receive a small cash incentive in return for two visits per month to their ward. The Malaysian Welfare Department

has also received federal funding from the 11<sup>th</sup> Malaysian Plan 2016-2020 to build over 200 activity centres for older persons for each Parliamentary constituency. These Senior Citizen Centres (*Pusat Aktiviti Warga Emas*) were introduced in 2012 as it repurposed the 22 Senior Citizen Day Care Centres (*Pusat Jagaan Harian Warga Emas*) that were not functioning as intended. As these are intended to enhance social participation rather than provide care, we have not considered these activity centres as part of the long-term care system although they have the potential for such.

Malaysia's long-term care system is fragmented, owing to the divide between health and social care as well as between public and privately funded care. Family members caring for an older family relative with limited physical or mental function would face difficulty in navigating the system in the search for the right level of care and means to finance it. Malaysia adopted deinstitutionalization and focused on family and community care, but the burden of care falls disproportionately on female, be it informal or formal care. The continued support by the government in hiring domestic workers as a strategy to sustain female labour productivity [15, 16] also undermines the potential growth of much needed community-based services. In addition, the gap in the types of care available between public and privately funded care is the impetus behind the commodification of care. The distinction between private-for-profit and private-not-for profit service providers, with issues in matching government support and/or public donations, could potentially render existing aged care operators at a disadvantage.

## 5. Long-term care policy and practice measures

### 5.1. Whole sector measures

Whole sector measures have been driven through coordinated efforts between the Association of Aged Care Operators of Malaysia (AgeCOpe), medical societies, various Ministry of Health departments, the Selangor COVID Taskforce, the Ministry of Welfare, the Malaysian Ageing Research Institute and other interested parties who developed an “Interim Recommendations for the COVID-19 Pandemic in Private, Public, and NGO Residential Aged Care Facilities” released through AgeCOpe and various informal networks primary through social media messaging on 21 March 2020 (<https://msgm.com.my/covid-19/>). The guidance is hosted on the Malaysian Society of Geriatric Medicine website in four languages (English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil), and contained a toolkit containing forms and signage in particular. It has since been revised to include guidance on discharges from hospital just three weeks later, in response to concerns about financial difficulties by our care homes [17]. The Malaysian Welfare Department also provided cash disbursement to individual care homes, as part of the federal government's welfare package [18].

The adoption of these interim recommendations was announced by the Director General of Health on 16 April 2020. Subsequently, on 2 May 2020, the Director General of Health announced that all care home staff and residents would be tested and the initiative would include unregistered care homes as well as religious-based institution (*pondoks*), as part of the country's



measures to secure the safety of its most vulnerable population, as it seeks to ease lockdown measures. A guideline on “Care of Older Persons in Residential Aged Care Facilities and in the Community during COVID-19 Pandemic” was released and distributed by the Ministry of Health.

## **5.2. Care coordination issues**

### **5.2.1. Hospital discharges to the community**

The care of older persons discharged to the community from the hospital is mainly tasked to family caregivers who may or may not have received training by the hospital staff on how to provide care. Some older individuals were fortunate enough to have pre-existing care arrangements either from foreign domestic workers or homecare providers. However, with all travel in and out of Malaysia cancelled, it has become impossible to engage foreign domestic workers. Home care or mobile care operators are also unable to provide new services due to the Movement Control Order. Mobile and community aged care services have not been explicitly listed as essential services throughout the Movement Control Order, severely restricting the operators’ ability to continue their work unimpeded. In addition, they lack personal protective equipment (PPE), and therefore many choose not to work for their own safety. No arrangements can be made for continued rehabilitation during this period.

However, the apparent absence of community care throughout the pandemic period has not deterred family members from taking their older relatives’ home. Many fear the potential of catching COVID-19 if their loved one remained in hospital, and the difficulty of not being able to visit due to the blanket ban on visitors have also pushed many to beg for earlier discharges.

### **5.2.2. Hospital discharges to residential and nursing homes**

During the first three weeks of the movement control order, the interim recommendations advised against any admission to care homes, including hospital discharges and direct admissions from the community. This was not sustainable, not necessarily because hospitals were becoming too full, as across the board, hospitals were not full due to a reduced number of visits to the emergency department, routine surgery was cancelled and was routine outpatients. Many care homes were struggling to pay their staff because of reduced income due to dwindling resident numbers. Despite hospitals not being full, doctors sought to discharge patients as soon as possible, even to care homes, to avoid hospital acquired SARS-CoV-2 infections.

Some hospitals had refused to test older patients prior to discharge to care homes. Most homes are unable to afford enough facemasks and gloves and have little else in terms of PPE. Few homes have isolation facilities for their residents, and as most homes are privately operated, many family members refuse to pay for the additional cost of PPE and testing after discharge. Care home providers who are encountering cashflow issues if they did not admit new residents, found themselves compelled to take the risk of accepting discharges. Despite fewer people coming to hospitals and routine clinics appointments and surgery cancelled during the Movement Control Order, there have been repeated reports of doctors coercing reluctant care home operators to

accept discharges without testing. On 18 May 2020, the MOH made it mandatory for hospital discharges to residential and nursing home to undergo COVID-19 testing.

However, with horrifying reports from Europe and US care homes being affected by discharges who were inadvertently exposed to SARS-CoV-2 during their hospital stay, an increasing number of doctors have caved into pressure to test, and this eventually led to a blanket agreement by all Ministry of Health hospitals to test all hospital discharges to care homes which was released just a week ago.

Other than a modest cash handout to care homes, which will barely fund PPE for new admissions, there does not appear to be any effort the government to distribute PPEs to care homes. Care homes, however, have received occasional, uncoordinated donations from various sources mainly of face masks and gloves, due to increased public awareness, with the help of social media campaigns as well as mass media communications initiated by the interim recommendation group [19,20].

### **5.3. Care homes (including supported living, residential and nursing homes, skilled nursing facilities)**

#### **5.3.1. Prevention of COVID19 infections**

The Interim Recommendation states that 'no visitors should be allowed' unless the resident is terminally ill, or under special circumstances agreed upon by the management team such as if the resident has dementia and shows severe behavioural difficulties if the family member does not attend. Visitors who are allowed need to agree to contactless temperature checks, symptom screening, and travel and health declarations.

In addition to the above, many care home operators were acutely aware of the potential risk that transmission in their care homes would ruin their businesses. Their staff members willingly cooperated to their employers' request to move into the care homes and to self-quarantine the entire home throughout the Movement Control Order. The compliance of staff members was, however, likely to be encouraged by the difficulties staff members encountered in getting to work, as care homes were not considered essential services during the initial phase of the lockdown. In addition, many feared employment difficulties post-MCO.

### **5.3.2. Controlling spread once infection is suspected or has entered a facility**

Care homes operators have been advised to arrange for any resident with suspected COVID-19 to be transferred to the nearest COVID hospital as soon as they are able to safely do so. While arrangements are being made, they are asked to place the older resident in a single room, or at least 2 metres away from other residents and to limit the number of staff members who provide care to one person if at all possible utilizing any PPE they are able to put together with improvisation if necessary. The care operators have also told to notify the local district health office. Both the list of addresses of COVID hospitals and contact details of local district health offices were provided to care home operators with the interim guidance, and operators were encouraged to identify the nearest COVID hospital and district health office beforehand.

With regards to the isolated recorded outbreak, contact tracing was immediately carried out and all the residents of the care home transferred to the nearest COVID hospital to be tested and isolated, since isolation was not possible in the care facility. All residents were treated as close contacts if they tested negative, and all were cared for in hospital until they had negative swabs following 14 days' isolation.

### **5.3.3. Managing staff availability and wellbeing**

Many care homes are dependent on foreign workers in addition to trained nurses waiting for placements under the Ministry of Health. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Health ceased all new recruitment due to financial difficulties, and the newly qualified nurses ended up seeking employment in care homes. In addition, many senior nurses also took on senior positions as care home managers. The COVID-19 pandemic had led to the Ministry of Health summoning these freshly trained nurses, who are bonded to serve the government, immediately, leaving many care homes short staffed.

Little is known of any available measures to address staff morale and wellbeing during this stressful period, and care home operators are very much left to their own devices in this area.

### **5.3.4. Provision of health care and palliative care in care homes during COVID-19**

Hospices have consistently declined any requests for visits to care homes even before the pandemic, therefore care homes have largely provided palliative care to their residents unsupported. Advanced care planning is generally only initiated if the care home medical director or general practitioners chooses to do so. Many care homes in Malaysia are operated by general practitioners. However, in most cases, advanced care planning is not provided at any point. Care home operators will call the ambulance as the first response if residents fall sick and do not tend to entertain the possibility of end of life care in the care home, with some confusing withholding treatment with euthanasia. Therefore, the use of artificial feeding through long-term nasogastric tubes is commonplace in patients with advanced dementia and other terminal conditions within care home settings [21].

Community health care for older adults is virtually non-existent, and care home residents generally face difficulties attending health clinics or GP clinics, usually resorting to the emergency

department as their first port of call [22]. There is no evidence of any change in such behaviour or the healthcare provision available to the care home resident during COVID-19.

## **5.4. Community-based care**

No specific guidance for community-based care during COVID-19 has been developed. Day care and day centres are not allowed to operate during the MCO and despite initial positive indications, the district health offices have not provided the green light for reopening. Senior citizen clubs and activity centres also remain unopened as they are deemed recreational facilities and therefore not considered a social care priority. The home help program (KBDR) for the disabled and older persons is largely suspended as it depends on community volunteers.

As community-based care in Malaysia is still under-developed and paid largely out-of-pocket, the government does not have a comprehensive approach to its regulation. Day centres are, however, required to register under the new Private Health Aged Care Facilities and Services Act.

### **5.4.1. Measures to prevent spread of COVID19 infection**

Home help and home visit volunteers were told to cease operations throughout the Movement Control Order. Nevertheless, demand for mobile nursing and live-in carers are still strong. Private mobile / home nursing providers are still advertising their availability throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the fear of COVID-19 transmission, home care provision is primarily provided by full-time live-in nurses or trained caregivers. As there is no regulation in this sector, some agencies have decided against mobile nursing, since PPE cost up to four times their regular hourly rates, and few clients are willing or able to afford this additional payment. However, other agencies have elected to continue providing a service with symptom and temperature screening and just surgical masks and gloves for protection.

### **5.4.2. Managing staff availability and wellbeing**

Since many home nursing providers are also operators of residential care facilities, staff out of work were advised to take leave or reassigned to other work. The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development activated a special COVID-19 counselling hotline to provide psychological support to the public who have been impacted by the pandemic and Movement Control Order. The tele-counselling service is provided through the existing Talian Kasih 15999 and WhatsApp 019-2615999.

### **5.4.3. Impact on unpaid carers and measures to support them**

Family caregivers have been the least supported group even before the pandemic. Although Malaysia has financial assistance programmes for caregivers of bedridden family members, the number of recipients is small. As most of the cash transfer programme targets poor or lower income households, most unpaid carers receive only receive tax relief to offset healthcare costs for their parents. Support is sorely needed for family caregivers and unpaid carers in the form of respite care as well as other measures such as grocery runs, delivery of medication via post/mail,

and care training. No COVID-19 related relief measures are currently available for informal caregivers. As many care homes are not admitting, and many family members are unwilling to admit their loved ones to a care home, and home care services are also limited to premium live-in options, the burden of care on family caregivers and other forms of informal care.

### **5.5. Impact on people with intellectual disabilities and measures to support them**

Malaysia's care homes for people with physical and intellectual disabilities are regulated under the same Care Centre Act under the Department of Social Welfare. During the outbreak and subsequent Movement Control Order, the government is aware of the impact of the social distancing measures on people with disabilities and have relented to cooperating with NGOs in delivering aid and support. At the later phases of the MCO, more distribution of basic goods were carried out through offices elected representatives at the local level, under the official coordination of the District Social Welfare Offices (Pejabat Kebajikan Masyarakat Daerah).

### **5.6. Impact on people living with dementia and measures to support them**

All day care centres were told to shut throughout the MCO and to remain shut until further notice. The day care centre staff are paid by charitable bodies who have continued paying them, and therefore provide virtual support to their clients through video calls, send activities to their clients, and exercise videos. Hospital clinics which provide phone-in enquiries and walk-in services for emergencies, have regularly reported desperate calls from caregivers of older persons with dementia, and have little to offer in terms of support.

## **6. Lessons learnt so far**

The social care policy for Malaysia has lagged behind the country's development since independence, leading to unregulated care homes and home care providers now providing the bulk of long-term care in Malaysia. Apart from a small number of outbreaks, Malaysia's experience with care homes during COVID-19 has been surprisingly positive. Both the Social Welfare and Health sectors willingly worked with lobby groups and NGOs to protect care homes very early on the second wave which started on 10 May 2020. The desire to 'do well' in terms of COVID-19 control and the feeling of solidarity and good will that emerged during this pandemic, had led to surprisingly positive responses and support to provide for those more vulnerable to COVID-19. The mini outbreak almost provided the ideal springboard to sound the alarm and sparked a series of responses which finally led to mass testing of care home staff and residents.

While many other countries, particularly in Europe and North America, struggled with unimaginable death tolls, Malaysian officials, healthcare providers and care homes watched in horror and moved to rectify any deficiencies in our system to avoid our care homes becoming the source of the next wave. This crisis, therefore, perversely opened up many opportunities for

society to right many wrongs in their previous persecutory stances on care homes. Care homes prior to COVID-19 were shunned by society, received no financial subsidies from the government, whose policy it was to ensure that adult children remembered their obligation to their older parents to provide for them in their old age [19].

### 6.1. Short-term calls for action

With widespread testing now a reality, the next challenge is to ensure the delivery of PPE to care homes throughout the country regardless of legal status. It remains unclear who will pay for the PPE, which is expensive, and therefore not generally affordable to care homes nor to the adult children to have to pay for care home bills, which average RM3000 per calendar month, whereby the average household income for Malaysian is RM6,000 per calendar month.

The interim recommendations development group through MyAgeing, UPM, is expected to obtain funding from the World Health Organization to facilitate coordinated efforts to train care home staff on infection control and supply of PPEs to these facilities. There is also an effort to conduct harmonized studies to gain insights on behaviour of older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as promoting greater awareness in the situation among community-living older persons.

### 6.2. Longer term policy implications

The Private Aged Healthcare Facilities and Services Act 2018 will be enforced in 2020, and this COVID-19 experience has helped smoothen implementation, with unregistered care homes now coming forward for testing.

## 7. References

1. Abdullah, J. M., Ismail, W. F. N. M. W., Mohamad, I., Ab Razak, A., Harun, A., Musa, K. I., & Lee, Y. Y. (2020). A Critical Appraisal of COVID-19 in Malaysia and Beyond. *Mal J Med Sci*, 27(2), 1.
2. Department of Statistics, M. (2020, February 2020). "Malaysia Population Clock." [https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthree&menu\\_id=aXFLWERmeDJ5eIQxa0Y0N3FqTOt2UT09](https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthree&menu_id=aXFLWERmeDJ5eIQxa0Y0N3FqTOt2UT09). Accessed 15th May 2020.
3. Department of Statistics, M. (2020, December 2019). "Current Population-Age Structure." [https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemByCat&cat=155&bul\\_id=aWJZRkJ4UEdKcUZpT2tVT090Snpydz09&menu\\_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWVSZkiWdzQ4TlhUUT09](https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemByCat&cat=155&bul_id=aWJZRkJ4UEdKcUZpT2tVT090Snpydz09&menu_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWVSZkiWdzQ4TlhUUT09) Accessed 15th May 2020.
4. DG of Health. (2014) From the Desk of the Director-General of Health Malaysia: What is Crisis Preparedness and Response Centre (CRPC). <https://kpkasihatan.com/2014/08/04/crisis-preparedness-and-response-centre-cprc/>. Accessed 18 May 2020
5. Ministry of Health Malaysia (2020). COVID-19 (Latest Updates). <https://www.moh.gov.my/index.php/pages/view/2019-ncov-wuhan>. Accessed 18 May 2020.
6. Arjuna CS (2020). Covid-19: New cluster found among security personnel at Cheras mall. The Edge Markets. <https://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/covid19-new-cluster-found-among-security-personnel-cheras-mall>. Accessed 18 May 2020.

7. Outsider may be to blame for Kluang old folks' home Covid-19 cluster, says Dr Noor Hisham | Malaysia | Malay Mail [Internet]. [cited 2020 Jul 24]. Available from: <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/07/21/outsider-may-be-to-blame-for-kluang-old-folks-home-cluster-says-dr-noor-his/1886652>
8. Hisham N (2020). Press conference by Health Director-General Datuk Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah on the current situation of Covid-19 in Malaysia. <https://www.facebook.com/nstonline/videos/534204730587792/>. Accessed 21 May 2020
9. Situasi Terkini COVID-19 MALAYSIA. Available at: <http://covid19.moh.gov.my>
10. Mat, N. F. C., Edinur, H. A., Razab, M. K. A. A., & Safuan, S. (2020). A single mass gathering resulted in massive transmission of COVID-19 infections in Malaysia with further international spread. *J Travel Med*. Online early publication. 27(3): taaa059. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jtm/taaa059>
11. Karim, W., Haque, A., Anis, Z., & Ulfy, M. A. (2020). The Movement Control Order (MCO) for COVID-19 Crisis and its Impact on Tourism and Hospitality Sector in Malaysia. *International Tourism and Hospitality Journal*, 3(2), 1-7.
12. Hamdy, M. S., & Yusuf, M. M. (2018). Review on Public Long-Term Care Services for Older People in Malaysia. *Mal J Sc Health & Technol*, 2(Special).
13. Ibrahim, R., Tan, J. P., Hamid, T. A., & Ashari, A. (2018). Cultural, Demographic, Socio-economic Background and Care Relations in Malaysia. In *Care Relations in Southeast Asia*(pp. 41-98). Brill.
14. Brenda S. A. Yeoh PhD & Shirlena Huang PhD (2009) Foreign Domestic Workers and Home-Based Care for Elders in Singapore, *Journal of Aging & Social Policy*, 22:1, 69-88, DOI: [10.1080/08959420903385635](https://doi.org/10.1080/08959420903385635)
15. Crinis, V. & Bandali, A. (2017). Malaysia: balancing paid and unpaid work. In M. Baird, M. Ford & E. Hill (Eds.), *Women, Work and Care in the Asia-Pacific* (pp. 41-54). London, United Kingdom: Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/Women-Work-and-Care-in-the-Asia-Pacific/Baird-Ford-Hill/p/book/9781138119048>
16. Choong, C. W. W. and T. T. Tan. (2018, May 28, 2020). "The unsung labour: Care migration in Malaysia." from [http://www.krinstute.org/Discussion\\_Papers-@-The\\_Unsung\\_Labour-;\\_Care\\_Migration\\_in\\_Malaysia.aspx](http://www.krinstute.org/Discussion_Papers-@-The_Unsung_Labour-;_Care_Migration_in_Malaysia.aspx).
17. Interim Guideline Development Group (2020). Interim Recommendations for the COVID-19 Pandemic for Private, Public and NGO Residential Aged Care Facilities. <https://msgm.com.my/covid-19/> Accessed 20 May 2020.
18. Povera, A. (2020). RM25 million set aside for vulnerable groups. *New Straits Times*. Putrajaya. <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2020/03/578706/rm25-million-set-aside-vulnerable-groups> Accessed 20 May 2020.
19. Aiman A (2020). Old folk's homes out of food and money, says geriatrician. *Free Malaysia Today*. <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2020/03/29/old-folks-homes-out-of-food-and-money-says-geriatrician/> Accessed 20 May 2020.
20. Tan MP (2020). COVID19: Nursing Home Residents at Risk. BFM podcasts. <https://www.bfm.my/podcast/the-bigger-picture/health-and-living/covid-19-nursing-home-residents-at-risk>. Accessed 20 May 2020.
21. Nordin, N., Kamaruzzaman, S. B., Chin, A. V., Poi, P. J., & Tan, M. P. (2015). A descriptive study of nasogastric tube feeding among geriatric inpatients in Malaysia: utilization, complications, and caregiver opinions. *J Nutr Geront Geriatr*, 34(1), 34-49.
22. Mohd Mokhtar, M. A., Pin, T. M., Zakaria, M. I., Hairi, N. N., Kamaruzzaman, S. B., Vyrn, C. A., & Hua, P. P. J. (2015). Utilization of the emergency department by older residents in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. *Geriatr Geronto Int*, 15(8), 944-950.