



Hakimah helping retiree Govindasamy Muthan, 67, understand the results of his sarcopenia screening at the Lembah Pantai PAWE in Kuala Lumpur. — Photos by AIDA AHMAD/The Star

Changing mindsets on care for elderly

AS MALAYSIA progresses towards becoming a “hyper-aged society” by 2059, when 21% of the population will be 65 years old and above, experts are advocating for a paradigm shift in how we care for our seniors.

For Muhammad Mujada Rosli, 46, who serves on the committee of the Lembah Pantai Senior Citizens Activity Centre (PAWE) and manages the Genting Dementia Care Centre in Segambut, it starts with awareness and prevention.

“PAWE promotes healthy ageing and prevents dementia.

“It is about building a sensitive, intergenerational community that sees ageing as something we’re all a part of,” he said.

While Malaysia’s regulations for care centres operate on a one-caregiver-to-four-patients model, PAWE centres are meant to keep people healthy before they require that level of care, he added.

That prevention-first mindset is echoed by Assoc Prof Dr Doris Padmini Selvaratnam from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM).

She is part of a group of experts who designed the Wellness Across Ages intergenerational programme for high-rise communities, under the Gerontological Association of Malaysia (GeM).

The pilot project is supported by the National Centre for Excellence in Mental Health (NCEMH) under a Hasanah Foundation Mental Health grant.

“Most senior citizens don’t respond well to jargon-heavy talks or PowerPoint slides,” Doris said, “so our mental health modules for the programme will be activity-based, with small group interactions and movement.”

But to run such programmes effectively in high-rises, she said, they needed support from joint management bodies (JMBs) and the management committee (MC).

“When we have that, we can analyse outcomes,” she added.

In urban areas – where more elderly people now live in condominiums or apartments – isolation is a growing problem, especially after illness or injury.

Assoc Prof Dr Hakimah Sallehuddin, a geriatrician at Hospital Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah, UPM, who is also involved in the pilot project, believes PAWE can fill that gap.



Muhammad Mujada says PAWE helps prevent dementia and promotes health ageing.



Doris says their modules for seniors are activity-based, with small group interactions and movement.

“We need activities for post-stroke patients too, screening for sarcopenia, and spaces that foster intergenerational relationships,” she said.

“At high-rise buildings, we need to help the seniors build intergenerational communities where young people can also communicate with the elderly population.”

People living in high-rises who want to be part of the pilot project can email gempesona2025@gmail.com

Malaysian Research Institute on Ageing (MyAgeing) director Dr Rahimah Ibrahim, who delivered a talk on “Intergenerational Relationships and Care for Senior Citizens at Home and in the Community at Lembah Pantai PAWE”, sees PAWE as a critical link but says it needs to evolve.

“Most seniors prefer to age in place,” she said, citing the Malaysia Ageing and Retirement Survey Wave 2 (2021-2022).

“We need services like home rehabilitation, respite care or trained caregiver support.”

She believes PAWE can be that bridge: offering referrals, caregiver training and even serving as a hub for cooperative or social enterprise services.

More inclusive, intergenerational spaces where children can do homework, seniors can engage, and caregivers aren’t left to carry the burden alone will help tremendously, she added. — By AIDA AHMAD