

# Industry reforms must be handled with care

**PETALING JAYA:** Malaysia's plan to overhaul and regulate its care sector is a necessary step to protect vulnerable groups and prepare for an ageing society, but experts warn that reforms must be carefully designed to avoid higher costs, fragmented enforcement and reduced access for families.

The proposed National Care Regulatory Body, outlined in the Malaysia Care Strategic Framework and Action Plan 2026-2030, has been welcomed as a long-overdue move to bring coherence to a fragmented sector.

Prof Dr Tan Maw Pin, a professor of geriatrics and consultant geriatrician at Universiti Malaya Medical Centre, said a central authority is essential if Malaysia is serious about positioning itself as a regional retirement and long-term care hub.

"The first priority must be to ensure aged care facilities are registered. But this must be done with effective incentives and support, not punitive measures that drive up costs or push operators out of the system," she told *The Star*.

She cautioned that imposing higher standards without financial support could result in care homes shutting down, worsening an already fragile care landscape.

"We are facing a care crisis.

"If homes are closed because they cannot meet new requirements, where will residents go?"



**Sharing opinions:** Dr Tan (left) and Chai.

She added that grants should be made available to operators who are trying to keep care affordable while upgrading facilities to meet regulatory standards.

Without such support, she said, the costs of training, certification and compliance are likely to be passed on to families, adding to their financial burden.

Dr Tan also called for regulation to extend beyond institutional settings to include home-based care, whether delivered through agencies or freelance caregivers.

"Older adults are extremely vulnerable. Paid caregivers should be registered, trained and subject to safeguards against abuse, including police checks and offender registries," she added.

She further raised concerns over uneven enforcement, noting complaints from private operators that authorities could be

"extremely strict", and called for streamlined standards and licensing of care facilities.

"The current system is challenging. Operators have to deal separately with local councils, welfare departments, fire authorities and health departments, followed by multiple inspections that are time-consuming," she said.

Dr Tan also emphasised the importance of professionalising caregiving as a viable career, complementing plans to train 50,000 caregivers under the framework.

She noted that geriatric medicine has become one of the most sought-after specialties in countries such as the United Kingdom and Singapore, adding that caregiving could follow a similar trajectory.

"With proper training, caregiving will no longer be seen as dirty, dangerous and degrading," she said.

Universiti Putra Malaysia's Malaysian Research Institute on Ageing research officer Chai Sen Tyng said fragmented governance remains one of the most serious structural weaknesses in the care ecosystem.

"We need an inter-agency coordination body or task force because the care sector cuts across multiple ministries and government agencies.

"While the core issue is care quality, it extends to infrastructure, manpower and consumer protection. Issues of safety,

capacity, training, remuneration, fees and legal frameworks are all interconnected," he said.

Chai added that such a task force should go beyond setting standards and include mechanisms such as tribunals or ombudsmen at the local level to handle disputes, complaints and enforcement issues.

"When we talk about standards of care, it is not just about training syllabuses. It includes incident reporting, monitoring, legal compliance and professional codes of conduct," he said.

He also pointed out that most care services in Malaysia are provided by the private sector, yet financing mechanisms to reduce out-of-pocket costs for families remain weak.

"We should not operate under the illusion that care is publicly funded," he said.

On enforcement, Chai noted that the regulatory framework for aged care remains inadequate, pointing out that the Private Aged Healthcare Facilities and Services Act 2018 (Act 802) has yet to come into force.

He added that home- and community-based care remains largely unregulated and underfunded, even as demand grows rapidly.

"The care landscape is changing and evolving, and the government must catch up. It starts by recognising that care activities are fundamental to human productivity," he said.