

Sun Life Malaysia Reports Rising Blood Glucose Levels Among Malaysians, With Youth Largely Unaware

- **Alarming Trends:** *One in three (30%) of Malaysians are pre-diabetic or diabetic, with significant numbers unaware of their health risks*
- **Youth in the Dark:** *Majority of young adults (84%) aged 18-29 are unaware of their diabetic status*
- **Older Adults at Higher Risk:** *Three-quarters of those with elevated blood glucose levels (75%) are 41 years old and above*
- **Economic Divide:** *Low-income households stood the majority of participants with elevated blood glucose levels*

Kuala Lumpur, 14 November 2024 – Despite increasing awareness of health and wellness, Sun Life Malaysia's fifth annual nationwide Blood Glucose Screening reveals almost one-third of Malaysians are grappling with elevated blood glucose levels. The programme screened over 5,100 participants, highlighting that 30% of Malaysians are either pre-diabetic or diabetic. Notably, young adults aged 18-29 show alarming lack of awareness, with 84% unaware of their diabetic status, signaling an urgent need for targeted education and intervention. The programme highlights the challenges posed by aging, socio-economic factors, and lifestyle habits.

Key findings are:

One-third of Malaysians are diabetic or pre-diabetic

The programme which screened 5,190 participants found that close to one-third of Malaysians have elevated blood glucose levels, which are made up of 16% participants in the pre-diabetic range and 14% in the diabetic range.

Raymond Lew, CEO and President/Country Head of Sun Life Malaysia shared, "It is disheartening to see such significant numbers of Malaysians with high blood glucose levels despite years of health education. Our data shows an increasing trend among older Malaysians, reinforcing the importance of managing diabetes as we age. The fight against diabetes is a long but necessary journey that needs to start early. Through our annual nationwide blood glucose screening programme, Sun Life Malaysia is committed to raising awareness and empowering Malaysians to take charge of their health."

Diabetes prevalence on the rise among young adults

While older Malaysians make up the majority of those with elevated blood glucose, 25% are aged 18-40, pointing to a rise in diabetes prevalence among younger populations. Particularly concerning is that 84% of young adults aged 18-29 with diabetes are unaware of their risk, underscoring the need for greater health education targeted at youth. The data reveals that 15% of young adults aged 18-20 already fall within pre-diabetic and diabetic ranges, emphasising that this traditionally 'adult' disease is impacting younger demographics at unprecedented rates.

Age and socio-economics factors impacting diabetes risk

Data shows a rising trend of elevated blood glucose among older adults, with 75% of those with elevated levels aged 41 and above, indicating a strong link between diabetes risk and aging. Additionally, nearly 82% of those with high blood glucose come from lower-income households (earning below RM5,000 monthly), highlighting the socio-economic impact on health. Limited access to diabetes education and an increased reliance on refined carbohydrate foods may contribute to this risk in lower-income groups.

Lew continued, "With rising medical costs, it is essential for Malaysians to engage in early blood glucose screening to better understand their health status. Unfortunately, many people remain passive about health management until financial implications surface later in life. Sun Life Malaysia's blood glucose screenings aim to empower individuals to reclaim their health, especially in areas like diabetes."

Empowering Malaysians through the Diabetes Coaching Programme

In collaboration with BookDoc, Malaysia's leading digital healthcare provider, Sun Life Malaysia launched a three-month Diabetes Coaching Programme designed to manage diabetes risks and promote a holistic healthy lifestyle. The programme saw a total of 533 participants (10% of screened individuals) take charge of their health through personalised coaching, nutrition management, and physical activity incentives.

The coaching programme resulted in half of the enrolled participants (50%) with elevated blood glucose reporting improved or stable blood glucose levels throughout the programme. A combined 70 percent of enrolled participants also improved their food ratings, while 80 percent of participants within the overweight category with elevated blood glucose achieved weight reduction. Additionally, 85 percent of enrolled participants with elevated blood glucose increased their average daily steps throughout the programme through BookDoc's Activ Reward System.

"Our Diabetes Coaching Programme has proven to be a valuable resource in empowering participants to manage their condition. It's inspiring to see the impact it has had in helping participants achieve improved and even stable blood glucose levels, as well as an increase in their daily physical activity. By integrating digital tools, we are able to make diabetes management more accessible and engaging. Features like the digital health coaching, traffic light food rating and step-tracking rewards system provide personalized, easy-to-use guidance, resonating well with users. This combination of digital accessibility, tailored support, and proactive engagement highlights the importance of using technology to promote sustainable, positive health changes." Reuben Poh, CEO of BookDoc.

Now in its fifth year, Sun Life Malaysia's nationwide Blood Glucose Screening Programme promotes healthy lifestyles and early diabetes detection. In partnership with Health Lane and Roche Diagnostics, the company offered free blood glucose screenings and discounts on glucometers. Additionally, in collaboration with MOG Eyewear, free eye health assessments were made available at 41 locations across Malaysia to address diabetes-related vision risks. Since 2019, the programme has screened over 35,000 Malaysians.

Appendix 1:

Key Findings	Statistics
Prevalence of Pre-diabetes and Diabetes	30% of Malaysians are at risk of diabetes: 16% pre-diabetic, 14% diabetic.
Youth Awareness	84% of young adults are unaware of their diabetes risk, with 15% already pre-diabetic or diabetic
Age-Related Risk	75% of those with elevated blood glucose levels are 41 years and older
Socioeconomic Disparity	Low-income households have a higher prevalence of elevated blood glucose levels
Gender trend	More men screened tested positive for diabetes: 37% of men compared to 24% of women
Ethnicity trend	Indians had the highest diabetes risk (40%), followed by Others (38%), Malays (28%) and Chinese (27%)

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As a life insurance and Family Takaful provider, Sun Life Malaysia offers a comprehensive range of products and services to Malaysians across the country and is focused on helping Clients achieve lifetime financial security and live healthier lives. Sun Life Malaysia distributes its products through a range of distribution channels including bancassurance and bancatakaful, agency force, direct marketing and telemarketing, corporate and government business and e-distribution.

Sun Life Assurance Company of Canada is a principal operating life insurance subsidiary of Sun Life Financial Inc., a leading international financial services organisation providing insurance, wealth and asset management solutions to individual and corporate Clients. Sun Life has operations in a number of

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Sun Life Financial Inc. trades on the Toronto (TSX), New York (NYSE) and Philippine (PSE) stock exchanges under the ticker symbol SLF.

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