

Trustworthiness biggest motivator in ensuring health security

By [Dzulkifli Abdul Razak](#) - April 6, 2022 @ 12:00am



This check-in data contains intimate details about an individual's personal preferences, consumption patterns and social networks, among others. - NSTP/GENES GULITAH

The World Health Day celebrated on April 7 every year takes the theme: Our planet, our health.

Therein is a very important message that escapes us most of the time: We are inherently connected to the planet.

The microcosmic world within us is linked in a holistic way to the external macrocosmic world. Thus, our health and planetary health are linked as well.

The pandemic is the living reminder of this, illustrated by the many unfortunate incidences involving vaccines which have been dubbed as "vaccine inequity," "vaccine nationalism," and even "vaccine apartheid".

Nevertheless, one important lesson learned is the issue of trust amid the pandemic.

Much has been said about this over a range of issues, notably through opinions that resulted in ambiguity due to weak data sources, especially in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The use of face masks alone has caused so much uncertainty depending on the political inclination or even the cultural orientation of a community.

This has eroded the level of trust several times because of the ever-changing mindset in trying to cope with insurmountable challenges of the pandemic that demand swift reactions.

While it has been pointed out that it is vital to maintain public trust during the pandemic, there is pressure to demonstrate that the government has the ability and efficacy to control the Covid-19 pandemic.

In 2017, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development highlighted that "reliability, responsiveness, openness, better regulation, fairness, and inclusive policy-making are key areas for governments to gain public trust."

In contrast, "the lack of transparency and timely and accurate communication by the government has been identified as a major element that has caused the decline of trust in government."

All these have, in turn, had an impact on planetary health, as reflected by the overall communal health status globally.

This could be made worse when some doubt the science and are less likely to trust health experts about the issues based on the same principle.

Even if a small segment of the public is not convinced by scientific recommendations, it is enough to put everyone at risk.

This brings us to the recent development when MySejahtera was said to have changed hands from the public to the private sector.

Although the issue is still being debated, by and large it will have an impact on the public level of trustworthiness, namely among the users of the app.

Of utmost concern is data privacy and the potential abuse of health-related data belonging to millions of Malaysians who have voluntarily decided to trust the system with their private data and information.

A bigger concern is the "infodemic" wave which seems to pose a huge challenge in convincing the public that it will not happen.

Simply put, it is imperative to communicate clear evidence to the contrary to Malaysians who are beginning to distrust the powers that be.

According to the Health Ministry's data published on GitHub, MySejahtera has reportedly recorded over 11 billion check-ins since December 2020.

This check-in data contains intimate details about an individual's personal preferences, consumption patterns and social networks, among others.

The government's assurance that individuals' personal information will "only be used for the purpose of managing and mitigating the Covid-19 outbreak," is now being questioned when the transfer to a private entity took place allegedly without consultation of those who voluntarily consented to deposit their data and information in defence of the country's health security.

It is, therefore, worth reasserting the statement by Transparency International Malaysia which expressed concern about the lack of transparency over the government's handling of the MySejahtera Covid-19 contact tracing mobile application data: "The Health Ministry also cannot share MySejahtera data with other ministries or the private sector ... and just hope that the community will not hesitate and continue to use the MySejahtera application."

In many ways it runs counter to the World Health Day theme when health trustworthiness is being squandered away, intentionally or otherwise.

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