

The Knesset

**Member of Knesset Yakov Litzman**

Yakov Litzman is a Member of Knesset on behalf of the United Torah Judaism faction. Litzman served as the Deputy Minister of Health and is currently the Minister of Health. He is the official representative of the Ger Hasidic dynasty in the Knesset, as part of "Agudat Yisrael" and as a follower of the Rebbe of Ger, Rabbi Yaakov Aryeh Alter.

Litzman was born in 1948 in a displaced persons camp in Germany to Holocaust survivors from Poland who belonged to the Lithuanian sect of Judaism. In 1950, the family moved to the United States, settling in Brooklyn. In 1966, when he was 17, Litzman immigrated to Israel in order to continue his Torah studies.

Litzman served as the General Director of "Beit Ya'akov – Chasidei Yerushalyim". He initiated the establishment of ultra-Orthodox residential areas in Beit Shemesh, Ashdod, Tel Aviv and Arad. In the beginning of the 1980s, Litzman served as an advisor to the Ger Rebbe, Rabbi Simcha Bunim Alter, and was sent to the Knesset as an assistant to MK Avraham Yosef Shapira. In the 12th Knesset, from 1990 to 1992, Litzman was an assistant to MK Rabbi Moshe Zev Feldman, the representative of the Ger Hasidic dynasty in the Knesset, who served as chairman of the Finance Committee.

Litzman was first elected to the Knesset in 1999, as a member of the 15th Knesset. During that Knesset, from 2001 to 2003, and during the 16th and 17th Knessets, from 2005 to 2007, he served as the chairman of the Finance Committee.

During his time in the Knesset, Litzman initiated a number of laws, including the Special Cultural Educational Institutions Law, 2008, determining that the Minister of Education can recognize schools that do not teach the core subjects as "special cultural educational institutions" and to fund them at 60% of the government budget for public schools. He also initiated a law that exempts houses of prayer – synagogues, mosques, churches and Khalwats – from paying leasing fees to the Israel Lands Authority.

In the 18th Knesset, Litzman became the head of the United Torah Judaism faction, but due to opposition from members of his party he was not appointed head of the Finance Committee, as in the past. Although he declared that his rabbi instructed him to not serve as a deputy minister, he finally agreed to serve as Deputy Minister of Health. At the same time Litzman ceased to serve as chairman of United Torah Judaism, and MK Menachem Eliezer Moses was appointed in his place.

During his tenure as Deputy Minister of Health, Litzman caused several shake-ups within the health system due, among other things, to his insistence on implementing Article 8(d) of the Brain-Respiratory Death Law, 2008, which allowed the family of a person who has been declared brain-dead to insist on not disconnecting their relative from respiratory machines and to continue the support for the patient until the cessation of the heart's action. One of his biggest achievements as Deputy Minister of Health was the funding of dental treatment for children from the budget of the national health care system. In dealing with the matter of IVF treatments, Litzman also considered Jewish law. During his term as Deputy Minister of Health, in 2011, there was a doctors' strike which lasted five months.

During his time as Deputy Minister of Health, a controversy arose over the location of the new emergency room at the Barzilai Medical Center in Ashkelon. In the original plan, then-Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Prime Minister's Office Director-General [Raanan Dinur](http://www.herzliyaconference.org/eng/?ArticleID=1830&CategoryID=223) determined that it was to be built on the site of an ancient graveyard. Despite Litzman's opposition, the prime minister decided to build the emergency room and the hospital's fortified wing in accordance with the original plan and to remove the graves found at the construction site. In May 2010, the clearance of the graves began despite the protests of Haredi Jews in Ashkelon and throughout the country.

In the the 19th Knesset, United Torah Judaism did not join the coalition, and sat in the opposition.

In the 20th Knesset, the faction joined the coalition, and Litzman was appointed Deputy Minister of Health. He continued with the reforms he initiated during his first tenure, and transferred mental health clinics to medical care centers. Litzman continued to conduct surprise visits in hospitals, and announced his intention to allow family doctors to issue prescriptions for medical cannabis, to be sold in pharmacies.

In August 2015, following a petition submitted by the Yesh Atid faction, the High Court of Justice determined that Litzman cannot serve as a deputy minister, and must become a minister. In light of this ruling, the Council of [great] Torah Sages of Agudat Yisrael decided to change its previous decision, which stated that MKs who are members of Agudat Yisrael cannot be appointed ministers, and allowed Litzman to be appointed Minister of health in September 2015.

Litzman is considered a social and reformist minister who works for the benefit of the health system, without distinguishing between populations. In various public opinion surveys carried out in the two years following his appointment as minister, Litzman was rated the most popular minister in the government.

In 2016, Litzman declared a public battle against junk food and obesity within the population. Following a highly publicized dispute with the McDonald's fast-food chain, Litzman announced that he would supervise the food served to children in schools, forbid the sale of hot chocolate with high sugar levels and subsidize food for gluten-free patients. He also spoke against overeating sufganiyot during Hanukkah.

Towards the end of 2016, Litzman established the Regulatory Committee for Promotion of Healthy Nutrition, which supervises over the labeling of all food products with a green or red sticker indicating whether they are a healthy food or not and specifying the level of health risk associated with the ingredients, similar to procedures that are practiced worldwide.