

More should be done to support seniors as aspirations change: DPM

PAP Seniors Group will push to ensure they have good opportunities in the economy

Isabelle Liew

As part of efforts to refresh Singapore's social compact and combat negativity surrounding ageing, the People's Action Party Seniors Group (PAPSG) will push to ensure seniors have good opportunities in the economy and help to provide better end-of-life care.

As Singapore's population continues to age rapidly, with one in four citizens above 65 by 2030, more should be done to support seniors as their expectations and aspirations are changing, said Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong at a commemoration of International Day of Older Persons at Concorde Hotel on Saturday.

"Now more and more seniors want to stay active, be it in the workplace or in the community. In the future, I'm sure our seniors will stay healthier for longer, and they will be more educated, more independent, as well as financially comfortable," he said in a speech to 300 party activists and retired MPs.

Society's perception of seniors must change, said Mr Wong,

TAP SENIORS' EXPERIENCE

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DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER LAWRENCE WONG, on how society's perception of seniors must change.



Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong addressing People's Action Party activists and retired MPs at a commemoration of International Day of Older Persons at Concorde Hotel on Saturday. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

adding: "We must embrace productive longevity and view our seniors as assets. We must find new ways to tap the wealth of experience and knowledge of our seniors."

To ensure seniors have good

opportunities in the economy, PAPSG will help them remain in the workforce for longer if they prefer. A new anti-discrimination law to protect workers from unfair treatment in the workplace is

also in the works.

"We will continue to study what more needs to be done in this area, around employment opportunities and workplace and employment practices," Mr Wong said.

The group also aims to provide better assurance to seniors on ageing with purpose and dignity, such as enabling them to have socially active and healthier lifestyles through preventative healthcare and community activities.

"We will continue to ensure our HDB estates and neighbourhoods are senior-friendly, so that our seniors will not be hindered in any way by their physical environment," he added.

"The worst thing that can happen is when a senior stays at home and just watches TV every day. The decline is very rapid. So we need that strong community network to reach out to these seniors... give them some purpose to be in the community, to make friends and have strong relationships."

As more seniors are living on their own and do not have family support, PAPSG will also explore designing and scaling up assisted living options.

About 120 PAPSG activists have taken a palliative care training session on how to support caregivers and those suffering from terminal illnesses. Some have become palliative care ambassadors in their communities.

Jurong GRC MP Xie Yao Quan, the organising chairman of Saturday's event, said seniors must continue to play an essential role in building Singapore's future.

PAPSG will continue to advocate for seniors, including through the Forward Singapore conversations, he added. "We know cost of living is a serious concern for all Singaporeans including our seniors, especially those who have retired. On our part, PAPSG will continue to highlight these concerns and listen closely to (what people are saying on) the ground," he said.

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Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital opens new nursing home in Potong Pasir



Far left: The newly opened nursing home by Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital (KWSH) was chosen to be in Potong Pasir due to the high number of seniors there.

Left: Health Minister Ong Ye Kung (centre) chatting with residents at the opening of the new facility on Saturday. With him are (from left) MP for Potong Pasir Sitoh Yih Pin; and KWSH's vice-chairman William Leong and chairman Patrick Lee.

Osmond Chia

Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital (KWSH) opened its second nursing home on Saturday morning in Potong Pasir to meet the needs of the high concentration of seniors there.

The neighbourhood was chosen due to the high number of seniors compared with the national average, many of whom need nursing, daycare and traditional Chinese medicine services that will be provided by the home, said KWSH chief executive Ow Chee Chung.

The home also specialises in dementia care and can receive seniors with dementia from public hospitals to free up wards for patients with more urgent conditions, said KWSH chairman Patrick Lee during the home's opening.

In a collaboration, Tan Tock Seng Hospital nurses will work with the home's employees and train them to look after seniors with mild to moderate dementia in a five-month deployment until January 2023, said Mr Lee.

The home's opening coincides with KWSH's 112th anniversary, making it one of the oldest charitable healthcare institutions here.

The new facility, which has 438 beds, brings the total number of beds across its six eldercare facilities to 1,200.

Besides its other nursing home in Serangoon Road, KWSH has four care centres, including its Jalan Besar and MacPherson facilities, that offer eldercare services during the day.

Health Minister Ong Ye Kung,



Residents enjoying an aerobics session at the home on Saturday. Beyond the usual services as a senior care centre, the new home in Potong Pasir will support up to 75 seniors daily through activities like dancing and taiji, and social work such as weekly visits to lonely seniors and running errands for them. ST PHOTOS: ALPHONSUS CHERN

the guest of honour at the opening, said the nursing home will give the nation a boost in its fight against the Covid-19 pandemic as it helps to free up resources in hospitals to focus on more acute patients.

The Ministerial Committee on Ageing is finalising a plan by 2023 which will focus on care for se-

niors, said Mr Ong.

Beyond the usual services as a senior care centre, the new home in Potong Pasir will support up to 75 seniors daily through activities like dancing and taiji, and social work such as weekly visits to lonely seniors and running errands for them.

These programmes are part of a goal to develop the centre as an active ageing care hub, which welcomes seniors to drop in for social and recreational activities to keep them engaged in the community.

The home's development as a care hub will be supported with a transition grant from the Ministry

of Health and is expected to reach out to at least 350 seniors in Potong Pasir in its first year of operation, said Mr Ong.

The home is also partnering schools at St Andrew's Village located next door to bring the young and old together in activities such as carnival games and outdoor

walks. Mr Ong said in his speech: "I think it's very precious. When you have a school next to a nursing home and you bring old folks and young people to interact together as a community, even when you're old, you'll feel young."

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Covid-19 antibody treatment no longer recommended for use

Zhaki Abdullah

A Covid-19 treatment authorised here in 2021 is no longer recommended for use, said the National Centre for Infectious Diseases.

NCID clinical director Shawn Vasoo said the centre does not rec-

ommend the use of casirivimab-imdevimab - used to treat mild to moderate Covid-19 cases - because of its poor activity against Omicron variants.

The Health Sciences Authority granted casirivimab-imdevimab interim authorisation under the Pandemic Special Access Route in September 2021.

About two weeks ago, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said it strongly advised against using casirivimab-imdevimab and sotrovimab, another Covid-19 treatment, because they were less effective against newer variants.

The two antibody treatments work by binding to the spike protein of the Sars-CoV-2 virus, limit-

ing its ability to infect cells.

The United States Food and Drug Administration said in April that it no longer authorises the use of sotrovimab to treat Covid-19.

While sotrovimab retains some activity against Omicron variants BA.1 and BA.1.1, it has poorer in-vitro neutralisation against the BA.2, BA.4 and BA.5 variants, Dr Vasoo said. He added that the national Covid-19 therapeutic work group, which he leads, has since April 28 advised that a higher dose of sotrovimab be used if the drug's use is being considered.

One other antibody treatment, tixagevimab-cilgavimab, is avail-

able in Singapore and retains at least some activity against the BA.2, BA.4 and BA.5 Omicron variants, he said, adding that it is more effective than sotrovimab.

Dr Vasoo noted that the predominant circulating variants are now BA.4 and BA.5, and that the Sars-CoV-2 virus continues to evolve.

Given the limitations of antibody drugs in treating Covid-19, alternative treatments should be considered, he said. These include antiviral drugs such as Pfizer's Paxlovid or MSD's Lagevrio, which were approved here earlier this year.

"There remain some sub-groups of patients, though, who may bene-

fit from antibody treatment, and the Covid-19 therapeutic work group will be reviewing its recommendations with the evolving data and also WHO's recent guidance."

The Ministry of Health on Friday said there has been a 35 per cent to 40 per cent week-on-week rise in daily Covid-19 cases in the past few days due to an increase in BA.2.75 variant cases, accounting for about a quarter of all daily infections.

But this has not led to more severe cases, and there has been no significant impact on the health-care system.

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