

# Eldercare centres to double, with more services being offered

## Nursing homes to increase number of beds and take on bigger role in end-of-life journeys

Clara Chong

Singapore aims to almost double its network of eldercare centres and nursing home beds within years as its population ages and it prepares to care for more elderly sick people.

The scale and scope of services at eldercare centres will be expanded to include simple health screenings, for example.

Meanwhile, more nursing homes will be roped in to help their residents manage end-of-life journeys, Health Minister Ong Ye Kung said yesterday.

He was speaking at the Agency for Integrated Care's (AIC) annual Community Care Work Plan Seminar. The AIC was set up by the Government to coordinate eldercare services.

Flagging the national challenge of looking after the aged sick, Mr Ong said: "To be honest, the community care sector will actually bear the brunt of this tremendous demographic change."

That is why the number of eldercare centres will nearly double from 119 now to 220 by 2025.

The number of nursing home beds will also multiply. There were 9,600 in 2010, which jumped to 16,200 in 2020. These will almost double to 31,000 over

the next 10 years.

The expansion of eldercare centres will take the pressure away from acute hospitals and nursing homes, said Mr Ong. They are go-to points for seniors, and provide services such as active ageing programmes, befriending and information and referral to care services.

But the scope of eldercare centres will be increased, Mr Ong said. Eventually, each centre should be responsible for 1,000 to 4,000 seniors, and work with community networks such as grassroots organisations and general practitioners (GPs) to address seniors' health and social needs.

Currently, seniors visit their GPs or polyclinics once every few months for their chronic conditions. In between these visits, they can go to these centres to take part in health-related activities or enrol in active ageing programmes.

But the Ministry of Health (MOH) would like these centres to help seniors monitor their vitals, do simple health screenings and link up with other service and healthcare providers, Mr Ong said.

The escalating strains of an ageing population have impacted the community care sector tremendously, he said, adding that this sector has grown significantly over the years, and will continue to do so.

There is also a need to expand good-quality end-of-life care at

### More support for the elderly

- INCREASING NURSING HOME BEDS**  
Between 2010 and 2020, number of beds increased by **70%** (from 9,600 to 16,200). In the next 10 years, bed capacity will go up by close to **another 100%**, to more than 31,000.
- EXPANDING SCALE AND SCOPE OF ELDERCARE CENTRES**  
Currently **119** centres. By 2025, **220** centres. Each centre will be responsible for **1,000 to 4,000** seniors.
- MANPOWER CHALLENGES**
  - ENSURING COMPETITIVE SALARIES**  
About **\$290 million** committed to raise the salaries of community care workers from 2020 to 2023.
  - SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**  
Agency for Integrated Care's learning institutes have scaled up offerings, with **more than 18,000 training places** available annually.
  - DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION**
    - Funding of **\$18 million** under Community Care Digital Transformation Plan
    - Support for organisations to defray **up to 85%** of cost of digitalisation
    - Provision of consultancy services
    - Availability of training courses and programmes
  - CONTINUING NEED FOR FOREIGN MANPOWER**

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home, in centres and in hospices, said Mr Ong.

"Most of us prefer to pass on in a familiar environment, surrounded by loved ones, instead of in hospitals. But few of us actually do when the time comes," Mr Ong said.

He noted that over the last few years, MOH has tested and integrated new models of care between hospital and home. MOH

will have to do more for palliative care to be further anchored in the community, and nursing homes will be a key partner.

"Nursing home residents will not want to go through multiple transitions to hospital and back towards the end of their lives, as it can be very distressing," he noted.

MOH will work with the nursing homes to build up their staff's skills

and confidence in managing end-of-life journeys, including attending to residents' health symptoms, facilitating advance care planning and providing emotional support to residents and their family members.

"I know this is a major shift for many nursing homes. But when I think about the resident-centric motivation behind how you quickly came on board Care@NH, I

believe that you will rise to the occasion here too," Mr Ong said.

Care@NH refers to the scheme allowing fully vaccinated residents with Covid-19 who are asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic to remain in their nursing homes instead of being transferred to a separate care facility.

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