

People with dementia get more support in successful ageing plan

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As dementia cases rise with a rapidly ageing population, memory clinics that can confirm the diagnosis and cause of the ailment have been set up in 16 of the 23 polyclinics here to improve access in the community.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) is bumping up the number of community outreach teams known as Crest – which identify seniors at risk and refer them for assessment – from 61 to 73 by March 2025.

At the same time, the number of Crest post-diagnostic support teams that help newly diagnosed dementia patients and their families cope will be tripled to six, under a pilot. These teams link the families to resources and equip caregivers with coping strategies.

These initiatives are in a 2023 action plan for successful ageing, launched on Monday by the Ministerial Committee on Ageing, of which Health Minister Ong Ye Kung is chairman.

They add to a host of existing ones that the Government has put in place over the years, as it aims to build a dementia-inclusive Singapore. As part of the 2015 action plan for successful ageing, the Government has already established 15 dementia-friendly communities in neighbourhoods such as Yishun, Bedok and Toa Payoh East.

An estimated one in 10 people aged 60 and above here has some form of dementia, a syndrome in which there is deterioration in brain function. It is not a normal part of ageing.

The action plan also states that funding will be provided to enhance research on dementia, catalyse new innovations and scale up solutions shown to have good outcomes in delaying or managing the condition.

“Prevention remains the key pillar of our dementia strategy,” Mr Ong said on Monday at the launch event held at Ci Yuan Community Centre in Hougang.

Many developed countries, like Britain and France, have been able to lower their age-specific incidence of dementia, so the trend is not a given and can be reversed with preventive health, he said.

One reason is that there is now evidence that a proportion of dementia cases is related to diseases and conditions such as diabetes and obesity, which is why Singapore’s major preventive health strategy Healthier SG is a critical and necessary imperative, even for the prevention of dementia, he said.

The other major contributory factor of dementia is social isolation, which is something the active ageing centres here will help to address. It is also why the Government is supporting employment, learning and volunteerism, he said.

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