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**SPEECH BY MINISTER FOR HEALTH, MR GAN KIM YONG, AT THE
CHAS FAMILY CARNIVAL, TAMPINES COMMUNITY PLAZA, ON
SUNDAY, 11 JANUARY 2015, 10.55 AM**

Advisers to Tampines Grassroots Organisations

Dr Jennifer Lee, Chairman, Agency for Integrated Care

Grassroots leaders and members

Residents of Tampines

1. Good morning.
2. I hope you are having an enjoyable morning so far, participating in the various activities at the Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS) Family Carnival organised by the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC).



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3. This year marks 50 years of independence for Singapore. To all Singaporeans, happy SG50!

Improvements in Healthcare

4. Today's carnival also showcases how our healthcare landscape has evolved. In the early days, healthcare services were rudimentary, and the focus of medical care was on control of infectious diseases and ensuring adequate nutrition of the population. Medical teams were made up mainly of midwives and nurses treating women and children's health needs. Medical equipment was also basic. How things have changed!

5. Over the years, our healthcare system has evolved with the changing needs of the population it serves. We have achieved good outcomes for our people, and can continue to do so if all of us play our part. Singaporeans in general are enjoying longer and healthier lives. This is the result of not just better access to quality medical care and improvements in medical



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technology, but also the efforts of individuals and the community in leading and promoting healthier lifestyles.

6. Since 2014, we have been bringing initiatives such as Sundays at the Parks, National Wellness Programme, and the Healthier Dining Programme to the residents in Sembawang and Choa Chu Kang under the Healthy Living Master Plan (HLMP). Building on the success and experience at the two precincts, the Healthy Pathway @ Tampines programme will link activities, infrastructure and facilities within the community to create an environment that makes healthy lifestyle options accessible, affordable and more effortless for the community.

Increasing Accessibility of Outpatient Care (CHAS Milestones)

7. We have also taken steps to make primary care more accessible and affordable for Singaporeans. In 2000, the Ministry of Health started the Primary Care Partnership Scheme.



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8. In 2012, the Primary Care Partnership Scheme was significantly enhanced and became the Community Health Assist Scheme, or more commonly known as CHAS today. We relaxed the age criterion to be 40 years and above, instead of restricted only to those 65 years and above. The ceiling for the monthly household income per person was also raised to \$1,500, so as to benefit middle-income Singaporeans.

9. Then, another two years later, in 2014, we opened up the scheme to all ages and further raised the monthly household income per person to \$1,800. And in a significant move by the Government, the Pioneer Generation Package extended CHAS benefits to all Pioneers. This means that there are now **1.2 million** Singaporeans benefitting from CHAS, which is more than double from a year ago.

10. To ensure that the scheme reaches out to as many eligible Singaporeans as possible, we have worked closely with healthcare institutions, GPs and dentists to get them to participate in CHAS, to bring affordable outpatient care to the doorsteps of Singaporeans. I am glad that



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the number of participating GP and dental clinics has increased from close to 1,000 a year ago to about **1,300** today. In Tampines GRC itself, there are over **74,000** CHAS beneficiaries, **44** CHAS GPs and **25** dental clinics today. This is more than half of the GP and dental clinics in Tampines GRC which are participating in CHAS. I would like to thank them for their support for CHAS. I would also like to take this opportunity to encourage everyone to find out more and sign up for CHAS. To our grassroots leaders and those who have already done so, do help to spread the word to your friends and neighbours.

11. The enhancements to CHAS are part of a series of wider changes to make healthcare, especially outpatient care, more affordable. For those who need specialist outpatient care, we increased subsidies for the lower- to middle-income, and gave special subsidies to the Pioneer Generation. We have also been gradually expanding Medisave use to reduce cash payment for patients for outpatient treatment. Last year, we allowed Medisave to be used for more chronic diseases and vaccinations. We have also made Medisave easier to use, by fully absorbing the transaction fees and removing



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the \$30 deductible so that patients can use Medisave from the first dollar for their chronic disease treatment. From the start of this year, patients have also been able to use Medisave to pay for outpatient scans for their medical conditions.

12. We will continue to allow Medisave for more uses, but do so carefully. The elderly is a special group. Some of them have less income but incur higher healthcare expenses. Their concerns have mostly focused on recurring outpatient care and many have asked for greater flexibility to use their Medisave. We will thus make Medisave more flexible for them by introducing a new outpatient Flexi-Medisave scheme from 1st April this year. Flexi-Medisave will allow the elderly (65 years and above) to use up to \$200 of Medisave a year for medical treatments at the Specialist Outpatient Clinics (SOCs) in public hospitals, polyclinics and CHAS GP clinics. Coupled with the enhanced subsidies, be it for specialist outpatient care or under CHAS, this means that the elderly will pay even less cash for their outpatient medical treatment.



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13. Medisave is what Singaporeans have carefully saved up for their healthcare expenses in old age. Even as we continue to make Medisave use more flexible, we encourage everyone to spend your Medisave dollar wisely so that you have enough for your healthcare needs over a lifetime. An additional \$200 of Medisave use a year goes a long way to defray the cost of subsidised outpatient treatment.

New Initiatives for Residents in Tampines GRC

14. I am pleased to share with residents some new initiatives that will take place or have already taken effect in the Tampines Constituencies.

15. Today, AIC will be piloting a localised map of all health and community care services in the five constituencies in Tampines – Tampines East, Tampines West, Tampines North, Tampines Central and Changkat. These maps will highlight information on the locations, contact details and operating hours of community and healthcare services, including all CHAS clinics, to help residents locate the care they need easily. These maps can be obtained at the AIC booth at this Carnival or your nearby Community Centres.



16. To further enhance accessible and affordable healthcare in the East, three Community Health Centres have been set up progressively since 2010. Situated in Bedok North, Bedok South and Tampines, the Community Health Centres serve GPs in the area by providing support services such as Diabetic Retina Eye and Foot Screening, X-ray, and physiotherapy services to better manage patients' medical conditions. Patients with the Health Assist or Pioneer Generation card pay subsidised rates for the services.

Conclusion

17. I would like to thank AIC and Tampines GRC for organising this year's CHAS Family Carnival. Today's Carnival aims to raise awareness of CHAS so that more can enjoy its benefits. On this note, I will leave you to enjoy the many activities planned for you and I hope you will also learn more about CHAS.

18. I wish you all a great day ahead! Thank you.

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