

**SPEECH BY MR GAN KIM YONG, MINISTER FOR HEALTH, AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF SILVER CIRCLE SENIOR CARE CENTRE AT SERANGOON CENTRAL, 14 JULY 2014**

Mr Lim Boon Heng, Chairman, NTUC Enterprise Co-operative

Ms Tan Hwee Bin, Chairman, NTUC Health Co-operative

Mr Heng Chee How, Deputy Secretary-General, NTUC

Mr Tan Suee Chieh, Group CEO, NTUC Enterprise Co-operative

Dr Jennifer Lee, Chairman, Agency for Integrated Care

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

**Introduction**

1. A very good morning to all. It gives me great pleasure to join you here today at the official opening ceremony of the Silver Circle Senior Care Centre at Serangoon Central.
2. With our population ageing rapidly in the decade ahead of us, our policies, healthcare infrastructure and services must be planned so that Singapore remains our best home even when our population gets older and wiser.
3. The Ministerial Committee on Ageing (MCA) is working on an action plan to help Singapore achieve successful ageing and since June, we have been holding focus group discussions with seniors from all walks of life to hear their aspirations and ideas on how to build a Nation for All Ages.

**Bringing integrated aged care services closer to the community**

4. A common view that has emerged from these sessions is that seniors want to stay independent in the community for as long as possible. Even when they become frail, they hope that they can be cared for near their homes so that their family and children will still be close to them, to love and care for them. Therefore, the Ministry of Health is giving priority to the development of good home and community-based care options to allow seniors to age gracefully at home and in the community.
5. For example, we are developing a network of community-based senior care centres across Singapore. These are integrated one-stop centres providing both health and social care services, which include day care, dementia day care, rehabilitation and nursing services. These centres can also be platforms to stage home care and other services to support the needs of seniors in the vicinity. In addition, they offer opportunities to partner local GPs to integrate

primary and aged care services to meet the healthcare needs of the seniors within the community. Having the various services under one roof makes it more convenient for seniors and caregivers as they no longer need to travel to different places for different services. Working family members can also be assured that there is a facility near home that is taking care of their loved ones while they are at work.

6. The centres will also benefit residents in the area who are looking for flexible employment. There will be ample new job opportunities that offer flexible work-hours close to home. There will also be opportunities for the community to volunteer their time and services at the centres. In short, these centres can be local eldercare hubs that are able to engage local GPs and seniors to help those in need of care, all within the same kampong.

### **Silver Circle Senior Care Centre at Serangoon Central**

7. This senior care centre at Serangoon Central is a good example. This is NTUC Health's first senior care centre, and a new addition to its existing suite of eldercare facilities, comprising eight Day Care Centres and six Senior Activity Centres. It supports seniors in the vicinity to age-in-place.
8. I am happy to see that this centre has started to benefit local residents. It has already cared for more than 200 seniors since it started operations at the beginning of the year. One beneficiary is 78 year old Madam Loh, who stays with her youngest daughter at Serangoon Avenue 2. As her daughter has to work to support the family, Madam Loh is alone at home in the day. Worried about her mother being home alone, her daughter came by the Centre one day to find out how the Centre can assist. She subsequently enrolled Madam Loh into this Centre, and brings her to this centre every day. Though a quiet lady, Madam Loh has made friends with many elderly at the Centre. She has her usual group of friends whom she loves to chat with, and share the same table during meals.
9. The centre is also able to leverage on the services provided by other NTUC facilities. Just next door is the NTUC Unity Family Medicine Clinic which complements the hospitals' work by caring for patients in the community with chronic diseases. The clinic has already attended to some of the seniors from this centre, making it even more convenient for seniors and their families.
10. Residents and the community at large have also benefited from the opening of this centre. The centre currently has three staff staying at Braddell Heights, and they walk to work daily. Since the Gym opened a month ago, 40 residents have already signed up to use the facilities. The centre also regularly engages schools such as Xin Min, Paya Lebar Methodist Girls, St Nicholas and Nanyang Primary for their students to visit the centre and gain a better understanding of how to engage and care for the seniors.

### **Centre-based Weekend Respite Care**

11. We want these centres to care not just for seniors, but support their caregivers as well. Caregiving is no easy feat and many caregivers experience physical and emotional stress in taking care of their seniors.
12. I am therefore pleased to announce the launch of our new centre-based respite care programme in seven eldercare centres across Singapore, including this centre. This programme allows caregivers to drop off their seniors at the centre to be cared for a few hours over the weekend. This is a funded service where eligible seniors can receive up to 80% funding. With the service, we hope that caregivers can take a break now and then to recharge, catch up with their personal and social life or run some errands. Caregivers can also have peace of mind if they fall sick or if they want to attend peer support group or caregiver training. By giving them some time to take care of themselves, caregivers can also take better care of their seniors. We will work with the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) and providers to expand this to at least three more centres over the next year to benefit more caregivers.
13. We are happy to work with NTUC in this programme. NTUC has told me that the weekend respite service is very popular at this centre. 14 elderly and their caregivers have benefitted from this service here. One such beneficiary is Madam Tan who is 81 years old, and attends Silver Circle day care centre. She has schizophrenia but stays alone at a 2-room flat. Because of her condition, Madam Tan needs to be monitored daily and reminded to take her medication. Before the weekend respite service started, Madam Tan's sister and only family member, used to make trips to her place every weekend and would call many times to find out if she had taken her medicine and is well. Mdm Tan's sister is herself already in the 70s, was also not in good health. The stress of constantly worrying over Mdm Tan was taking a toll on her sister. With the weekend respite service, Madam Tan's sister is now able to do other things on Saturdays such as run her errands, meet up with friends or relax at home. She has told staff at the Silver Circle Day Care Centre that the service is a tremendous help and relief for her. Madam Tan herself also looks forward to the Saturdays at NTUC, so much so that she dresses earlier than usual on that day to make the trip out to the centre.

## **Conclusion**

14. MOH will continue to systematically build more of such senior care centres to bring integrated aged care services closer to seniors. In the past two years, we have opened nine new eldercare centres across Singapore. These have provided a total of more than 400 additional day places. By 2020, we aim to more than double the current centre-based care capacity by adding more than 3000 day-care places.
15. We will also continue to work with community partners like NTUC to meet the needs of our seniors. NTUC Eldercare has been caring for working families and their elderly dependents in Singapore since 1997, and has grown from strength to strength. It now provides a range of aged care services from home care services to centre-based services, and is able to provide holistic care for our seniors. The new NTUC Health that Ms Tan Hwee Bin has just announced, is

another step towards providing an integrated suite of services to meet more needs.

16. I would like to congratulate NTUC Health for successfully opening its first Senior Care Centre. We look forward to the continued partnership with the new NTUC Health and the grassroots organisations in the years ahead of us. I am confident that this centre will support the needs of seniors and caregivers very well through its range of health and eldercare services, and will be a key asset benefiting the community here at Braddell Heights Division.

17. Thank you.