

Getting ready *for ageing in place*

Building a robust health ecosystem through collaboration

With longer life expectancies and lower birth rates, a quarter of the population in Asia Pacific will be over 60 by 2050¹. In Singapore alone, the number of elderly citizens aged 65 and above will increase from 460,000 in 2015 to an estimated 960,000 in 2030. The Future Health Index also found that both patients and healthcare professionals agree that the most important challenge for Singapore today is an ageing population. But how prepared is our society for this silver tsunami?

This panel discussion explored the challenges presented by an ageing demographic and how different stakeholders need to recognize their roles in meeting the changing healthcare needs of Singaporeans, many of whom wish to age in place. “Based on my personal experience, everyone wants to stay at home, with their personal community”, shared Associate Professor Lee Kheng Hock, President, College of Family Physicians Singapore. “Most people can stay and age in place if you provide adequate support and as you grow older, the support one needs is healthcare and social care”, he added.

Building blocks of a robust health ecosystem

Mr Suvendra Das, General Manager, Health Systems, Philips Singapore, believes that technology is an enabler in ensuring effective healthcare management and highlighted Philips’ role in addressing the challenges of an ageing population. He shared that a question they can ask themselves is, “How can we build a digital health ecosystem so that we can manage ‘ageing in place’- to ensure people age gracefully and comfortably, while at the same time, manage their health on the spot?”

Patients and healthcare professionals agree that the most important challenge in Singapore today is an ageing population, 58% and 78% respectively
Future Health Index

The panel also discussed the role of the insurance and financial sector in the health ecosystem. As people live longer and extend their economic lives, Mr Andrew Yeo, General Manager for Life Insurance at NTUC Income shared: “We’re beginning to look into how redesigning funding mechanisms are made affordable, coupled with services that are relevant to the elderly.”

Empowering the individual

When looking at the entire health ecosystem, a key element is also education at the community level. There is a need to increase the awareness of health conditions commonly associated with ageing, such as dementia and chronic diseases. To address this, Ms Fong Yoke Hiong, Assistant Director of Nursing at the Hua Mei Centre for Successful Ageing,

Tsao Foundation said that “All these go into education and having those resources put in place, placing support in the family to cope with the older person with dementia.”

The modernization of healthcare and the shift towards digital healthcare requires a change in mindset. Individuals need to overcome apprehension and become more receptive, comfortable and familiar with digital technology. “Initially, we saw a little bit of apprehension but after a few incidents when they see that every alternate day somebody is asking them ‘How are you?’, those are the things they don’t get in acute care set ups”, shared Mr Das. Mr Yeo brought up NTUC Income’s partnership with Philips, the insurance industry’s first telehealth program that supports the recovery and overall health improvement of policyholders who were recently hospitalized due to a recent heart failure or Ischemic Heart Disease. He highlighted the importance of familiarity and awareness in convincing and reassuring those patients. He added that they have seen good traction with the pilot program where some policyholders have shared the data captured during this program with their own doctors. “The doctors were pleasantly surprised and able to provide better diagnoses due to the regular data being captured”, said Mr Yeo.

The panelists concluded that, in order to really address the challenges of an ageing population, individuals have to take ownership and responsibility for their own health. Even the most robust health systems would fail without the cooperation of its most important stakeholder – the patient.



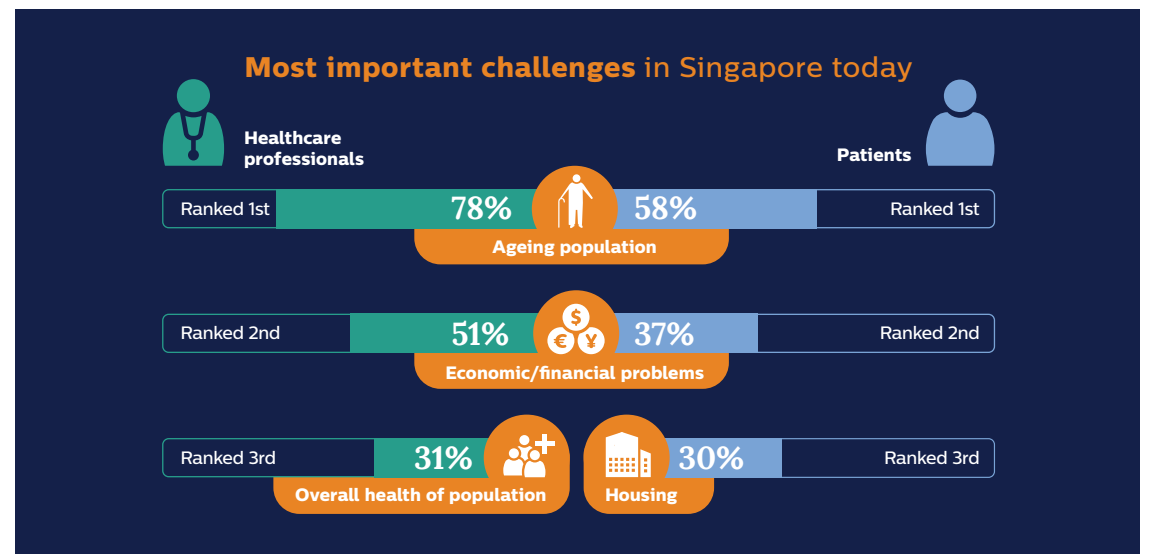
Mr Andrew Yeo,
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Source: Future Health Index 2016, commissioned by Phillips. www.futurehealthindex.com

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¹ Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, 2008 revision.