5TH ASIAN & JAPAN HIGH LEVEL OFFICIALS MEETING ON CARING SOCIETIES
(Summary of Country Presentation)

1 Introduction

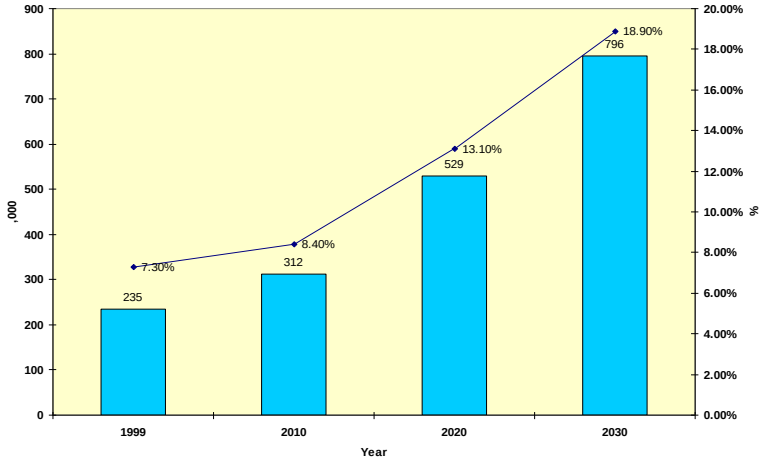
1.1 Singapore is a city state with a population of 4.5 million people, of which 3.6 million are citizens or permanent residents.

1.2 Singapore has the third highest rate of ageing in Asia. Only Japan and the Republic of Korea have higher rates. In Singapore, the number of seniors will increase from 8.4% in 2005 to 18.7% in 2030. In absolute terms, seniors will increase from about 300,000 in June 2005 to 900,000 in 2030. The pace of ageing will pick up momentum around 2011, when the first baby boomer cohort reaches 65 years. The economic burden on society will thus escalate, with our support ratio[1] projected to decrease from 1 elderly to 8.5 working-age residents in 2006 to 1 elderly to 3.4 working-age residents in 2030. Our low total fertility rate, which currently stands at 1.24 in 2005[2], will increase the socio-economic burden of an ageing population on the economically active members.

1.3 However, we believe that there are also many opportunities presented by an ageing population. Most older people will be healthy and ambulant. The challenge for us is to change the mindsets that with productive ageing, seniors are a resource, not a burden. We are optimistic that an ageing population will bring about a thriving silver industry too, creating economic benefits to our society while the increased range and diversity of available products and services will benefit our seniors as consumers.

2 Elderly Profile

2.1 At present, the number of persons above the age of 65 is 306,500, forming 8.4% of the total resident population. This percentage is expected to increase significantly in the next 20 years, as illustrated in the following chart:



[1] Support Ratio is computed as the number of residents aged 15-64 years per elderly resident aged 65 years and over.
[2] Source: Department of Statistics, Singapore.

3 Singapore's Philosophy

3.1 Singapore's vision for ageing is for all levels of society to be well-prepared for the challenges and opportunities of an ageing society and we seek to achieve the following desired outcomes:

i) At the individual level, we want our seniors to be **healthy, active and secure**. They should age with respect and dignity, and lead independent and fulfilling lives as integral members of their families and communities;

ii) At the family level, we want to see **strong, extended and caring families**. Family relationships of interdependence should complement the seniors' independence;

iii) At the community level, we want a **strong network of community services**, opportunities for engagement and integrated communities. We want to foster a deep sense of community ownership and a high degree of participation in securing the well-being of the senior and the family; and

iv) At the national level, we want to develop a **high level of national preparedness** for the ageing population, a competitive and vibrant economy as well as social cohesion and rootedness.

3.2 In our efforts towards addressing the issues of our ageing society through a financially sustainable system, we are guided by the following principles:

i) **Contributions from Senior Citizens**. Seniors should be valued as contributing and participating members of society, and should be enabled to remain physically, mentally and socially active for as long as possible. Our national policies must cater to seniors who are well and healthy, not just those who are frail and ill.

ii) **Care-Giving Primarily from Families**. We believe that the family is the primary care-giving unit and the bedrock of support for seniors. The family must be supported and strengthened in its ability to care for its older members to ensure that institutionalisation remains a measure of last resort.

iii) **Collective Responsibility from All Sectors**. We should uphold the "Many Helping Hands" approach of involving the community, the family and seniors themselves in ensuring the holistic well-being of seniors. The starting point, however, must be individual responsibility to plan and prepare for old age. The family is the first line of care. The community is the second line of support to enable families in their care-giving role. The role of the State is to provide a framework that enables the individual, the family and the community to play their part.

4 Inter-Ministry Efforts

4.1 The issues of an ageing population are multifaceted and dynamic. Addressing the far-reaching and multi-disciplinary issues requires cooperation and coordination among various agencies and the community. Thus far, the Government has adopted the "Many Helping Hands" approach in tackling ageing issues.

4.2 Since the 1980s, there have been several ministerial committees formed to look at ageing issues. The current Ministerial Committee on Ageing is chaired by a Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, signifying the importance of a high level inter-ministry approach towards developing holistic policy directions for ageing. Within the framework of maximising participation, health and security for older people, there are four strategic thrusts for Singapore in response to our ageing population.

Thrust 1: Enhancement of Financial Security and Economic Participation

4.3 The first thrust is to enhance financial security and economic participation of older people. Employment and employability of older persons are critical to give continued financial independence to seniors. If we succeed in increasing employment, this will reduce the economic burden and slow down the decrease in the support ratio. A tripartite committee on Employability of Older Workers, comprising the workers' union, employers and the Government, was set up in March 2005 to recommend measures to enhance the employability of older workers and help them stay employed longer, and to positively shape the perceptions and mindsets of employers and the public towards the employment of older workers. In 2006, the Employment Rate for residents aged 55 to 64 was 53.7%, a significant 6.7 percentage-points higher than that in 2004. In absolute terms, this meant there were 40,000 more older people in employment. This is a significant positive progress for Singapore. The tripartite committee also released a report on its recommendations in May 2007 on some of the concrete steps that would be taken to facilitate productive ageing:

A. Expand Employment Opportunities for older workers

(i) As many employers as possible will be encouraged to voluntarily implement human resource (HR) policies and systems to employ more older workers and facilitate older workers to work beyond age 62, the official age of retirement in Singapore. Efforts will be focused on specific industry sectors including Manufacturing, Services and the Public Sector.

(ii) The ADVANTAGE! Scheme, a package of incentives to help employers defray the cost of job modifications or training for older workers, will have increased funding to help companies build up capabilities to employ more older workers and to re-employ them beyond age 62. This includes giving support to implement HR policies and systems for the recruitment, retention and re-employment of older workers.

(iii) There will be legislative changes within 5 years to facilitate opportunities for older workers to work beyond age 62. The actual form of the legislation should be determined after assessing the progress of efforts made over the next 5 years, responses from companies and workers, and the prevailing economic environment then.

(iv) There will be promotion of the restructuring of work arrangements to provide more part-time and flexible work opportunities, and encourage community-based programmes such as job-matching services and training for older workers.

B. Enhance the Cost Competitiveness of Older Workers

(i) Efforts will be made to step up the pace of wage restructuring to move companies away from seniority-based wage systems to a more job-worth and performance-based wage system.

C. Raise Skills and value of older workers

(i) Tripartite partners will be reaching out to older Professionals, Managers, Executives and Technicians so that they can benefit from the Professionals Conversion Programme (PCP) to tackle structural skills mismatch and start careers in new growth sectors.

D. Shape positive perceptions towards older workers

(i) A Tripartite Centre for Fair Employment will be set up to expand the efforts of the Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices and institute a national award to recognise companies for implementing fair employment practices.

Thrust 2: Ageing in Place

4.4 The second key thrust is to enable older people to age-in-place. A barrier-free, accessible built environment and public transport system will enable older people to participate in economic and community activities. We have made some progress for our transport system. Since 2006, we have completed retrofitting all subway stations and they are barrier-free today. Also in 2006, the first wheelchair accessible buses were introduced. By 2010, 40 per cent of our bus fleet will be wheelchair-accessible. We are making efforts but more have to be done to implement barrier-free accessibility in Singapore.

Thrust 3: Affordable Healthcare & Eldercare Services

4.5 The third thrust is to provide affordable healthcare and eldercare services in the community to help the elderly to age-in-place in the community. We strongly believe that the family is the bedrock of society, and will continue to be the first line of care for older people. Fortunately, in Singapore, family ties remain strong, but we acknowledge that the family is facing many stressors, and with smaller family size, caring for the aged is increasingly getting difficult. Hence, a comprehensive range of affordable healthcare and eldercare services for older people in the community will help the family care for older persons. Our approach is to work closely with the NGOs to provide community based care services and caregiving support services to help families who need to care for elderly persons.

4.6 As an illustration of how serious we are about the role of the family, Singapore has enacted the Maintenance of Parents Act in 1995 to provide a legal avenue for elderly parents to seek maintenance from their children. The Act places the obligation to support an aged person on his child, hence supporting the principle of “Family as the first line of support”. We want adult children to continue to support their aged parents financially and emotionally to ensure their well-being.

Thrust 4: Active Ageing

4.7 The last strategic thrust is Active Ageing. In 1999, the International Year of Older Persons, Singapore embarked on large scale public education on ageing. Since then, there has been much focus on active ageing and intergenerational bonding programmes. Moving forward, a new Council for Third Age was set up to further promote active ageing, maintain greater physical and mental well-being among seniors, and encourage seniors to be as independent for as long as possible. The council will imbue positive perception of ageing and the elderly.

4.8 Given our demographic transition, Singapore's commitment to productive ageing has gain greater momentum in recent years. To cite the recently released AARP Multinational Survey of Opinion Leaders 2006, 'Population ageing is a high priority issue for most Singaporean opinion leaders'. Many older persons in Singapore do age with security and are increasingly being empowered to participate within their families and communities. Singapore is hopeful that as our older persons get more educated and are healthier, they will continue to build on their knowledge and experience, and continue to contribute as productive members of the workforce. We are confident the perception of older people and the population ageing will be increasingly positive.