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Looking after the needs of caregivers

BY 2030, there will be three working adults supporting every elderly person who needs care, compared with 10 working adults to one elderly person now.

This growing army of caregivers is an 'invisible' workforce whose needs must not be overlooked, said the Minister of State for Community Development and Sports, Mr Chan Soo Sen, yesterday.

Community organisations like Touch Caregivers Centre are vital in providing support and resources for these individuals, many of whom juggle home responsibilities with work, said Mr Chan as he launched Touch's first Caregivers' Week yesterday.

In 2000, there were 210,800 people caring for the elderly, disabled, mentally and terminally ill, and children of special needs.

The centre runs a helpline and provides information and referrals to medical and community services for caregivers. Set up in 2002, it is funded by the National Council of Social Service.

Yesterday, it also launched a book providing tips and resources for caregivers. All 5,000 copies will be distributed free at hospitals and voluntary welfare organisations.

Caregivers' Week will be marked by support group meetings, talks and seminars organised by various voluntary welfare organisations.

Singapore has one of the fastest ageing populations in the world. By 2030, 19 per cent of the population, or nearly one in five, will be 65 years or older, compared with 7.6 per cent last year.

To tackle the challenges of a greying population, a government committee headed by Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, Mr Lim Hng Kiang, will be looking at changing trends in the social and economic landscape.

These include a volatile economy, shrinking family size, and the growing number of singles and couples with few or no children.



Visiting the home of caregiver Madam Wong Yin Keng (seated) are volunteers (from left) Mr Philip Lye, a masseur; Ms Grace Lim from charity group Citycare; Mr Kelvin Erh, a hairstylist; and Mr Mark Ho, a trainee chef. -- STEVEN LEE

Working through various ministries, the committee wants to see how these trends will affect issues for the elderly, such as financial security, work, transport, health, and bonding in the community and across generations.

It is now inviting members of the public to give their views and attend dialogues on these issues.

Not only will a larger proportion of the population be older, it will also be better educated, more affluent, healthier, and have less family support. It is hoped that Singaporeans will assume greater responsibility in preparing themselves for an independent and secure old age.

The inter-ministerial committee on ageing was first set up in 1998. Some 90 per cent of the 78 recommendations it made the following year have been implemented.

These include changes to the Central Provident Fund policy so retirees will have a bigger nest egg to draw on and a medical insurance scheme for the elderly.

Reconstituted when Mr Lim took over in August last year, the 26-member committee comprises people from the public and private sectors.

Members of the public have till Oct 13 to express their views and interest in attending dialogue sessions. They can do so through:

the inter-ministerial committee's website at www.imc.gov.sg
fax at 6354-8135, or
mail, to 'The IMC Secretariat, c/o Ministry of Community Development and Sports, 14th Storey, MCDS Building, 512 Thomson Road, Singapore 298136.