

Detailed Notes

National Youth Dialogue Session 4 on Enhancing Health and Support for Families

Date/Time: Sunday, 6 November 2022, 1.30 - 4.00 pm.

Organisers: National Youth Council (NYC), Global Shapers Community (Singapore Hub), and the NTU Students' Union (part of the Inter-University Network).

Venue: *SCAPE, The TreeTop

Attendance: 70 youth participants

The dialogue started with a breakout session comprising three groups discussing three themes – health, social mobility and family – before the group reconvened for a large-group share back and structured discussion with the panellists.

INTRODUCTION

1. The host, Mr Tan Kuan Hian, Vice Curator of Global Shapers (Singapore Hub), welcomed participants to the fourth session of the National Youth Dialogue. He introduced the panellists and moderator:
 - i. Mr Ong Ye Kung, Minister for Health;
 - ii. Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Minister for Social and Family Development and Second Minister for Health; and
 - iii. Ms Indranee Rajah, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office and Second Minister for Finance and National Development.
 - iv. [Moderator] Mr V Dhanraj, President of the Nanyang Technological University Students' Union.

LARGE GROUP SHARE BACK AND PANEL DISCUSSION

2. Mr Dhanraj invited facilitators to share their insights and questions from their breakout groups across three topics: (i) Health, (ii) Social Mobility: and (iii) Family.

THEME: HEALTH

Discussion points from the breakout session:

3. Participants said that stressors that impeded physical and mental well-being were

often intertwined. They encouraged youths to lead healthier lifestyles and positively influence their social circles.

4. Participants acknowledged Singapore's ageing population and rising cases of chronic illnesses. They added that means testing made the process of grant application arduous. They suggested making health screenings more affordable and accessible to youths.

Question and answer:

“How will the Government ensure that youths live physically and mentally healthy lifestyles?”

5. Minister Ong said that today's youth had a different experience growing up due to having access to the Internet. He said that instilling cyber-wellness knowledge from a young age through the education curriculum was crucial so that youths would know how to deal with harmful content online and filter information appropriately.
6. Minister Ong said that while the Government would continue to work on increasing mental health capacity and improving psychological access, it remained critical to not “over-medicalise” mental-health issues. He said that good preventive care habits that contributed to mental wellness remained crucial, such as getting sufficient sleep and maintaining good social relations.

“How would the Government improve medical literacy (e.g. ability to distinguish fake news on the Internet), especially among the elderly?”

7. Minister Ong said that the COVID-19 pandemic allowed general practitioners into the public health system to deliver better preventive care. He said this could ensure lasting patient-doctor relationships and improve medical literacy among the elderly.

“Would we be able to simplify the means testing system to ensure easier access to preventive medicine and healthcare coverage, especially for vulnerable families?”

8. Minister Ong said strict means testing was still needed to ensure that Government assistance would reach those who need it most. He said that the means testing system could be simplified by reducing repeated tests conducted by different agencies as patients pass through the healthcare system.

“How is the Government planning to involve other healthcare professionals (e.g. physiotherapists, pharmacists, nurses, and psychologists) apart from doctors in the HealthierSG Plan?”

9. Minister Ong said that while doctors played a critical role in a patient’s life, he acknowledged that all other healthcare professionals also held essential roles.

“How will Singapore ensure sufficient manpower to staff nursing homes and assisted living facilities as competition for skilled nursing care increases globally?”

10. Minister Ong said that the rising demand for skilled nursing care was due to the population becoming more unhealthy and experiencing more chronic illnesses rather than due to an ageing population.
11. Minister Ong said that besides training more local nurses, it was also essential to encourage good foreign nurses to work in Singapore and ensure their integration into the care team.
12. Minister Ong also encouraged participants not to view other countries’ recruitment of Singaporean nurses as competition but as a potential for Singapore to grow as a talent hub for nursing training and qualifications.

THEME: SOCIAL MOBILITY

Discussion points from the breakout session:

13. Participants said that social mobility was related to a sense of “not falling behind” and acknowledged that Singaporeans trust that hard work would be rewarded with upward mobility.
14. Participants said that enhancing social mobility necessitated rethinking the forms of support offered and examining if other platforms (e.g. aside from housing) could be provided as a springboard for Singaporeans to achieve their potential.
15. Participants called for the private and people sectors to play a more prominent role in improving social mobility by offering upskilling opportunities for parents and providing additional support for children.

Question and answer:

“Our society seems to be quite resistant to wealth taxes. How do we enable wealth to flow better across society?”

16. Minister Ong said that wealth taxes and income transfers were one lever the Government utilised to address inequality issues. He said that these systems required the cooperation of the majority of Singaporeans and were similar to how 95% of Singaporeans took vaccinations to protect the minority from the spread of COVID-19.
17. Minister Ong said that many international economies would conclude that the fairest tax system was the Goods and Services Tax (GST), which could be levied across society. He said that the GST would need to be coupled with good redistribution and social spending programmes, such as investing in high-quality education, to improve the livelihoods of vulnerable families.
18. Minister Masagos agreed that taxation was one of the many structures for income redistribution. He added that wealth was best transferred through citizens' generosity and should not be forced, as many charitable actions tended to be carried out to fulfil personal spiritual needs.

“Are there better ways to ensure that opportunities and accurate support information become more accessible to vulnerable groups, which may be unaware of the aid they could receive?”

19. Minister Masagos said that the vulnerable groups were usually unaware of the different types of aid provided by the Government. He said that the Government aimed to close the gap in “last-mile” efforts by building trust with these families to understand their needs better and provide aid. He said that the Government would implement a scalable action plan to ensure a more extensive support system for individuals.
20. Minister Masagos said that outreach efforts to vulnerable groups should not solely be the Government's responsibility. He said that improving social mobility issues required coordination between different parties, including volunteer organisations and corporations, to ensure the long-term betterment of society.
21. Minister Masagos suggested that corporations could go beyond donating money to fulfil their corporate social responsibility. Running upskilling programmes targeted at lower-income groups to impart helpful knowledge would be more beneficial.

THEME: FAMILY

Discussion points from the breakout session:

22. Participants said that Singaporeans faced many challenges in building and supporting their families, such as housing stressors, rising costs of living and caregiving burdens.
23. Participants emphasised the importance of social structure in supporting families, such as social support from communities. They encouraged individuals to extend support to others to foster a family-friendly culture.
24. Participants said that work-life balance issues affected Singaporeans' desire to start families. While they acknowledged that flexible work arrangements (FWAs) were helpful, they also called for more equitable work arrangements between mothers and fathers and infrastructure to support different needs (e.g. childcare).

Question and answer:

“Would it be possible for the Government to create a multi-ministry taskforce for familial support just like it was for COVID-19?”

25. Minister Indranee said that the Government presently coordinated family-related policies across various ministries through the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to allow the cross-sharing of ideas and solutions to address issues on familial support.

“How can the Government provide more support to ensure better work-life balance for families and strengthen the social structure to give Singaporeans the reassurance they need to start a family?”

26. Minister Indranee said that the Government encouraged FWAs to ensure better work-life balance. She said that while FWA was generally associated with work-from-home arrangements, it would not apply to all employees (e.g. frontline workers). She said that to ensure the effectiveness of FWAs, employers must also come on board, as changing and redesigning structures would start from the workplace and HR departments.
27. Minister Indranee added that the Government would continue to review other forms of social support in light of rising living costs (e.g. reducing fee caps for childcare). She encouraged parents to adopt good parenting habits and provide a supportive environment aligned with their child's needs, focusing on supporting their children's self-confidence and development in their learning processes.

“Is it possible to equalise parental leave in the long run?”

28. Minister Indranee said that while the policy for shared parental leave was a start, the Government would first have to encourage more fathers to utilise paternity leave, as the current uptake was 50%. She said employers also had to be encouraged to be more facilitative of fathers taking paternity leave.

29. Minister Ong said that mandating equal parental leave would cause an undue burden on industries and companies that may need time to adapt. He said that as gender roles evolved, leave entitlement should also move in a similar direction and acknowledged that more needed to be done to ensure gender equality.

Closing

30. Mr Dhanraj thanked the panellists for their time.

31. Mr Tan shared that youths could partner with the Government through the Young ChangeMakers grant and encouraged them to participate in MOH, MSF and PMO's upcoming engagement sessions.

Notes recorded by the National Youth Council Youth Engagement and Leadership Teams