

# Nationwide study to gauge impact of policies, schemes for healthy ageing

Aim is to interview 10,000 seniors for insights on their well-being

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A nationwide study to gauge the impact of policies and programmes aimed at supporting older people and their caregivers and families will be rolled out on Tuesday by Duke-NUS Medical School's Centre for Ageing Research and Education (Care).

The researchers are looking to interview 10,000 people aged 60 and above to collect data to understand the health, social and mental well-being of seniors in Singapore to provide insights for effective policies as well as programmes and activities that support the rapidly ageing population.

This survey, funded by the Ministry of Health (MOH), is the third wave of the Transitions in Health, Employment, Social Engagement, and Inter-generational Transfers in Singapore (The Signs) study.

The first two were conducted in 2016 and 2019, making this longitudinal study one of Singapore's most comprehensive and representative studies on ageing.

The first two focused on health and found that the proportion of older adults with three or more chronic diseases nearly doubled from 2009 to 2017.

Some 37 per cent of survey respondents reported three or more chronic health conditions in 2017, up from 19.8 per cent in a 2009 study.

This time round, the third wave of The Signs study will be focusing on care, contribution and connectedness – the three Cs outlined in the MOH 2023 Action Plan for Suc-



The new survey, funded by the Ministry of Health, is the third wave of the Transitions in Health, Employment, Social Engagement, and Inter-generational Transfers in Singapore (The Signs) study. It will be focusing on care, contribution and connectedness. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

cessful Ageing.

Dr Rahul Malhotra, deputy director and head of research at Care, said there is a connection between seniors who participate in lifelong learning and volunteerism, and the data from this wave may provide the solution on how to interest more older people in these areas.

The study will discern patterns in digital technology use among older people for both general and health-related purposes, and before and after the pandemic. It will also identify factors associated

with greater or lower use over time, and study the impact of digital tech use on outcomes such as social engagement, loneliness and depression.

The recruitment of about 10,000 seniors for the study will include 2,887 of the 5,000 who took part in the first two surveys. The data from the study will inform evidence-based policymaking on productive and active ageing.

Care executive director Angeline Chan said: "We have been fixated on biomedicine for a long

time. It is only in the last five to seven years that we were increasingly interested in the social determinants and realising that the two are symbiotic. We want to look into the social changes among the elderly, (especially) post-Covid-19 pandemic."

Associate Professor Chan noted that the pandemic had resulted in the fear of leaving the home, the fear of contracting Covid-19, loneliness and depression among the elderly.

Similar longitudinal studies of

older people are being conducted in countries including the United States, Britain, Malaysia, South Korea, Japan and China at regular intervals.

Data from The Signs study will be aligned with the World Health Organisation's Decade of Healthy Ageing initiative, launched in 2020.

According to the annual Population In Brief report, the proportion of Singaporeans aged 65 and above increased to 18.4 per cent in 2022. By 2030, around one in four citi-

## UNDERSTANDING SENIORS

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**DR RAHUL MALHOTRA**, deputy director and head of research at Duke-NUS Medical School's Centre for Ageing Research and Education.

zens, or 23.8 per cent, will be aged 65 and above.

Dr Malhotra said: "Our team of researchers at Care analyses such data for developing a deeper, multifaceted understanding of the physical, social and psychological well-being of older Singaporeans, as well as the factors that enable and support their participation in and contributions to society."

Prof Chan said the link between dental health and cognition is one new area they will be looking at.

"Our bite strength is related to cognition and dementia. With the data, we will be able to develop a programme to relate nutrition and bite strength, helping to stave off dementia," she said.

Dr Malhotra said that letters will be sent out in batches to those aged 60 and above with details to recruit them for the study. The first batch has already been sent.

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