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SPEECH BY DR OW CHIN HOCK, MINISTER OF STATE

FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND MAYOR OF

TANJONG PAGAR CDC DISTRICT

AT THE SENIOR CITIZENS SHARING AND CARING LUNCHEON ON

SUNDAY 3 OCTOBER 1999 AT 12 NOON

AT NEPTUNE THEATRE RESTAURANT

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Demographic trends indicate that our society will age rapidly over the next three decades. Today, one in every 14 Singaporean is aged 65 and above. In 2030, this figure will rise to one in 5.

2 To prepare ourselves for an ageing population, we need to change our mindsets towards ageing and the elderly. There are two aspects to this mindset change. First, we need to recognise the importance of lifelong planning for old age. The older generations do little planning for their old age. Most of us in my generation spend our time and energy planning for our children, and not for our retirement. We worry first about our children's studies, then their careers and

their families. We work hard to save up so that our children and their children can have a better life. This is a natural expression of the instinctive love, care and concern that we have for our children.

3 However, with rising life expectancy, many of us would have nearly 20 years ahead of us after retirement. 20 years is a very long time. We have to make plans for ourselves too. We need to make financial plans for our own old age needs, lead healthy lifestyles, build family bonds early, develop new hobbies, interests and skills and have a group of old friends, so that we can age with security and dignity, remain active, and continue to contribute to our families and community. It is important that we make these plans early so that we can gradually ease into old age without a disruptive change in lifestyle.

4 Secondly, as individuals and as a society, we need to change our current perceptions of the elderly as dependent recipients of services in need of care. The old of the future will be richer, healthier and better educated. In fact, increasingly, our challenge is to provide meaningful roles for the independent and healthy senior citizens so that they live fruitful lives and continue to contribute to society in their retirement years.

5 The Community Development Council (CDC), through its extensive grassroots networks, can play a leading role in ensuring that the retirement years of our senior citizens are the golden years of their lives. The Tanjong Pagar CDC's response to the challenge of an ageing population is to develop an active and vibrant senior citizenry in the Tanjong Pagar CDC District. To do that, the CDC would adopt a four-pronged strategy, what we may term as a "healthy body, active mind, lifelong engagement and networked community" approach.

6 First, healthy body. Our CDC would encourage all our senior citizens in the District to stay healthy through regular community health screenings, educational health talks and a new senior citizens keep fit programme that would incorporate simple and enjoyable exercises into social activities popular among senior citizens. Through this customised keep fit programme, we hope that senior citizens would find exercising an interesting medium for interaction and relaxation, and make exercising their way of life.

7 Second, active mind. Our CDC would encourage our senior citizens to remain mentally active by creating a lifelong learning environment in the community. Apart from customising useful courses, such as IT courses for senior citizens, our CDC would launch a senior citizens lifelong learning programme, which would systematically incorporate educational components into recreational activities organised for senior citizens. Through this programme, we hope to make learning an "in" thing among our senior citizens, who could subsequently come together to form learning circles or learning clubs.

8 Third, lifelong engagement. Our CDC would promote lifelong engagement through employment and voluntarism. The CDC would provide training, counselling and job placements for senior citizens. At the same time, our CDC would provide opportunities for greater senior citizen voluntarism. Currently, many senior citizens are already coming forward to contribute their time and expertise to community service. Our community leaders, many of whom senior citizens, provide

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shining examples of how retirement years can be turned into golden years. Today's Sharing and Caring Luncheon is another example ----- it is jointly organised by 27 Senior Citizens Executive Committees in our District and our CDC to share with and care for the less privileged elderly in our community. We should encourage more of our senior citizens to get involved in this type of activities.

9 Fourth, networked community. Our CDC would work with Voluntary Welfare Organisations and grassroots organisations to establish an integrated community support network to provide community-based services to senior citizens. The community support network would have two components: (a) a network of hardware, such as the Multi-Service Centre for the Elderly which our CDC set up in 1998, and (b) a network of heartware of care-givers, comprising professional social workers, grassroots volunteers and other healthy and ambulant senior citizens. The two components complement each other. Our healthy and ambulant senior citizens should form a fundamental part of this community network to care for those in need. This would also reinforce the spirit of community self-help that our CDC tries to encourage among our residents.

10 I would thus encourage all of you to stay healthy, remain active, get involved and be an integral part of this networked community. It is with your active involvement that we can realise, as a community, our vision of an active and vibrant senior citizenry in our CDC District. Thank you.

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