

# *Singapore Government*

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### **EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY** **PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**SPEECH BY MR LIM HNG KIANG, MINISTER FOR HEALTH & 2ND  
MINISTER FOR FINANCE AT THE LAUNCH OF NATIONAL HEALTHY  
LIFESTYLE CAMPAIGN 2000 CUM THE SINGAPORE H.E.A.L.T.H  
AWARD 2000 PRESENTATION CEREMONY 7 SEPTEMBER 2000,  
SUNTEC CITY AT 7.40 PM**

Chairman, Committee on Healthy Lifestyle  
Distinguished Guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen  
Good evening to you all.

### **Introduction**

I am pleased to be here to launch the National Healthy Lifestyle Campaign 2000 and to present the Singapore H.E.A.L.T.H. Awards 2000.

### **The National Healthy Lifestyle Programme**

In 1992, the Ministry of Health embarked on a National Healthy Lifestyle Programme with 3 objectives in mind. The aim was to increase awareness of the different aspects of healthy living, to impart enabling skills to the various segments of the population to practice healthy living, and to create and foster a supportive social and physical environment to encourage healthy living among Singaporeans.

Looking back at these past eight years of the Programme we have achieved much of what we had set out to do. The various components of a healthy lifestyle, regular exercise, a balanced diet, no smoking and having good mental health, are well-known among Singaporeans today.

We have come so far because we had a good starting point. The vast majority of Singaporeans value good health. Survey after survey shows that Singaporeans rank good health as their No. 1 priority. Our main challenge is how to translate that priority into actual action. For example, the percentage of school children who passed the National Physical Fitness Award test has increased from 58% in 1992 to 76% last year as a result of the Trim and Fit Programme introduced in the schools. But only 17% of the population aged 18 years to 69 years exercise regularly. We must therefore encourage Singaporeans to continue with regular physical activities when they start working life. This is a key target group for our campaign.

Another example is smoking. The smoking rate is 15%, one of the lowest rates worldwide. But it still befuddles me, why anyone should want to smoke at all knowing the health risks involved. So while we have done well in the last eight years, much remains to be done.

### **Health and Productivity**

Last year, the National Healthy Lifestyle Campaign focussed on health at the workplace. We introduced the Singapore H.E.A.L.T.H. Award and A.C.T.I.V.E. Day. This year's campaign will again feature these two programmes.

I congratulate the Committee on Healthy Lifestyle for the hard work they have put in to promote these two Programmes. Mr Tan earlier shared with us that more than 250 organisations, 80 of which are newcomers, will participate in A.C.T.I.V.E. Day 2000. 135 workplaces are receiving the Singapore H.E.A.L.T.H. Award tonight. Of these, 42 are new organisations applying for the Award. It is heartening to note that 28 of last year's recipients showed improvement in their workplace health promotion programmes. The 135 Award winners employ more than 300,000 of our workforce, a 20% increase compared to last year. This is indeed a positive sign that our efforts in promoting health through workplaces has gained momentum. But we are racing against time.

### **The Significance of the Workplace As A Health Promotion Setting**

Singapore's workforce is ageing. The median age of the workforce has risen from 32.8 years in 1989 to 37.4 years in 1999. By 2020, 19% of the workforce will be over the age of 55 compared to just 8% in 1999.

An ageing workforce will affect the productivity of businesses if our older workers do not take good care of their health.

Studies have shown that effective workplace health promotion improves the health status of the workforce, thereby increasing national productivity and reducing health expenditure for the organisation and nationally. Promoting good health at the workplace is clearly a win-win proposition. The worker benefits from better health and sense of well-being. The employer benefits from lower absenteeism and lower healthcare costs. So how do we get our employers and workers to recognise and act on this?

### **Future Challenges for Workplace Health Promotion**

We face two challenges in creating healthier workplaces in Singapore. The first challenge is to increase involvement in workplace health promotion. Through the PS21 initiative, all public sector organisations now have workplace health promotion programmes. But only 33% of private sector organisations, reaching approximately 26% of the private sector workforce, have a workplace health promotion programme. Our objective is that 50% of the private sector workforce will have effective workplace health promotion programmes by 2005.

The second challenge is to ensure that our workplace health promotion programmes have an impact on the health status of the workers. It is time to move beyond awareness raising activities and into substantive interventions that will influence health outcomes for workers.

We want to see more emphasis placed on programmes that are likely to have an impact and demonstrate to the worker the benefits of workplace health. For example, specific programmes like health screening for staff, appointing a senior manager to oversee the programme, offering gym memberships as part of the benefits package, or promoting a healthy canteen menu. Companies can also introduce programmes to reduce health risk factors for target groups – for example those with diabetes, those who are overweight or sedentary, those with high cholesterol, and those who smoke. Or programmes tailored to individual needs – for example personal goal setting and counselling programmes.

We need to stay focussed on the 'bottom-line' – improved health outcomes and increased productivity. To achieve this 'bottom-line' and to have a serious impact on health and productivity, workplace health promotion must be strategically positioned within an organisation. It must be seen as an area of strategic importance to the productivity and profitability of an organisation, and be integrated into the organisation's mission and objectives. For this to become a reality, top management must be committed to it and health policies and programmes should be fully integrated into the organisation.

### **The Tripartite Committee on Workplace Health Promotion**

Last year at the presentation of the 1999 H.E.A.L.T.H. Awards, our Prime Minister announced the formation of the Tripartite Committee on Workplace Health Promotion. This Committee, under the able chairmanship of Mr Stephen Lee, President of the Singapore National Employers Federation, was asked to recommend strategies to encourage and support employers to implement effective workplace health promotion programmes.

### **The Tripartite Committee's Recommendations**

The Committee has completed its deliberations and has recommended 5 key strategies that address the challenges we face.

To achieve our goal of engaging 50% of private sector organisations, the Committee recommends that we conduct a promotional campaign targeting chief executives and human resource managers to reconfirm the value and benefits of workplace health promotion among Singapore's business community.

To reinforce the message that a healthy workforce is a key contributor to national productivity, the Tripartite Committee recommends that workplace health promotion be integrated into the productivity movement. In line with this, the Productivity and Standards Board will emphasise and include workplace health promotion as a key foundation programme in the Singapore Quality Circle, the Singapore Quality Award, and the People Developer Award, awards that facilitate the development of world-class organisations. This move sends a clear signal that organisations that aspire to be world-class organisations must be healthy workplaces.

To help organisations move beyond awareness raising and into the type of programmes I identified earlier, the Committee recommends that a grant be

provided to assist the bronze and silver H.E.A.L.T.H. Award recipients who have demonstrated their commitment to workplace health promotion, to further improve their programmes. My Ministry will co-fund up to \$5,000 to assist these recipients to secure the necessary expert advice and resources to strengthen their programmes. In addition, a 'toolkit' including promotional materials, programme planning tools, and health education resources will be developed as part of a comprehensive support service.

We must give organisations clear guidance about what we want to achieve and how best to achieve it. The Committee recommends that a set of outcome indicators be developed to define success in workplace health promotion and to clarify the endpoint all workplaces should strive for. Best practice standards will be developed to show the best ways to reach the desired endpoints.

The Committee emphasised that achieving our goal will require a collaborative effort involving government agencies, the business sector, health and fitness service providers, and the community. To foster this collaborative approach, and to strengthen national leadership in this area, my Ministry will establish an intersectoral steering committee to oversee the further development and implementation of the Committee's proposed strategies and initiatives. This Committee will again be led by the Singapore National Employers Federation and will include representatives from the employers, employees, and government agencies.

## **Conclusion**

The Tripartite Committee has set a clear direction for workplaces to embrace health promotion. Together with the schools and the community and grassroots organisations, the workplaces will promote the 4 key messages of:

- Don't smoke!
- Eat wisely!
- Exercise regularly! and
- Manage stress!

It is now my pleasure to launch the National Healthy Lifestyle Campaign 2000.

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