

Opening Speech by Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Communications and Information, Mr Tan Kiat How at the Opening of the Time of Your Life Celebration 2022 on Saturday, 1 October 2022

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Ladies and gentlemen

Introduction

1. I am very happy to join you today for this year's Time of Your Life Celebration.
2. I'm glad that we are launching this month-long event to celebrate seniors today, on 1 October. It coincides with the International Day of Older Persons, and I would like to commend this collaboration between the National Library Board (NLB) and Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS).

The Government is committed to helping Singaporeans age confidently and gracefully

3. As we know, Singapore's population is rapidly ageing. By 2030, about one in four Singapore residents will be at least 65 years old. We must work together to build an inclusive society where our seniors can live and age well. The Government takes a whole-of-society approach and is committed to help Singaporeans age more confidently and gracefully.
4. In 2015, the Ministerial Committee on Ageing, or MCA, launched the first Action Plan for Successful Ageing to achieve this outcome. This first plan included more than 70 initiatives, covering a total of 12 areas spanning across health and wellness, employment, and transport.
5. Seven years on, the MCA is now refreshing the Action Plan to address the evolving needs and aspirations of current and future seniors.
6. The refreshed Action Plan will complement the broader Healthier SG strategy recently unveiled by the Ministry of Health to help us to take charge of our health, and it focuses on 3Cs to empower Singaporeans to age well:
 - a. **Care** aims to empower seniors to take care of their physical and mental wellbeing so they can pursue their aspirations through healthy longevity.
 - b. **Contribution** aims to enable seniors to continue contributing their knowledge and expertise to society, even as they age.
 - c. **Connectedness** aims to support seniors to age-in-place and remain connected to their loved ones and the broader community.
7. This is very much related to the theme of this year's Time of Your Life Celebration, which is "Connections". The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified social issues, such as the isolation of our



seniors and increased stress on their caregivers. This was especially so during the period of heightened measures like the circuit breaker period in 2020.

8. Mental health experts have said that social distancing need not equate to social isolation. We may be physically distant, but we can still stay connected with friends, family, and society. To that end, the Time of Your Life Celebration's focus on the importance of connections is helpful. We want to encourage seniors to connect not only with their past and present, but also with their wider community, and into the future with improved digital literacy.

Technology is a key enabler to help Singaporeans live and age well

9. At MCI, we want to leverage digital technology to help all Singaporeans, including our seniors, live more engaged and enriched lives.

10. For instance, seniors who are digitally engaged will find it easier to keep in touch with family and friends, and stay connected in our digital society.

11. Having the relevant knowledge and skills will also bring about greater ease and convenience to seniors in completing their daily tasks, such as ordering groceries online, or making health appointments digitally.

12. That is why we launched the Seniors Go Digital programme to help seniors pick up digital skills that add convenience to their day-to-day lives. SG Digital Community Hubs were set up at Community Clubs and Centres, as well as selected Public Libraries, where Digital Ambassadors are available to provide one-on-one guidance to seniors to equip them with digital skills and tools. Seniors are also taught about cybersecurity risks and tips on how to keep themselves safe online. This complements the SG Cyber Safe Seniors Programme launched by the Cyber Security Agency of Singapore in 2021 to raise awareness and encourage seniors to adopt cyber hygiene practices.

Partnerships are key to leverage technology to help seniors improve their quality of life

13. But the Government cannot do this alone. We need to harness the expertise of partners from the people and private sectors, to allow all Singaporeans to fully reap the benefits of technology. The month-long Time of Your Life Celebration event illustrates this well. Through the partnership, NLB is able to connect its community of learners with SUSS's academic expertise in gerontology, to promote active engagement and collective sharing on ageing issues. Such community partnership further supports NLB's LAB25 (Libraries and Archives Blueprint 2025) role of building a vibrant and dynamic *Learning Marketplace* for everyone.

14. Last year, President Halimah Yacob launched the Digital for Life, or DfL, movement to encourage a collective whole-of-nation effort to build a digitally inclusive society where Singaporeans have the necessary digital tools, skills and aptitude to succeed in the digital future.

15. A key initiative of the DfL movement is the DfL fund, which supports ground-up community projects to achieve this vision. A number of such projects are already ongoing, with partners such as RSVP Singapore and Lions Befrienders. These partners conduct programmes that help seniors navigate the digital world safely, including how they can protect their digital identity, and how they can look out for online scams and harms.

16. There is also help for caregivers, who can tap on technology to aid in their care-giving, and hopefully lighten their load. For instance, Lions Befrienders, in partnership with IMDA, developed the i-ok@LB tablet that allows staff and volunteers to check on seniors remotely to ensure that they are well.



17. In this month's Time of Your Life Celebration, participants will be able to discover newer topics such as gerontechnology. This field of study looks at how technology can support seniors in living, working and staying connected with society. I look forward to hearing from some of the experts on this at the upcoming programmes.

18. We must continue to use technology to improve the lives of our seniors. I understand the Tech Bazaar at Toa Payoh Public Library later this month will showcase new assistive technologies that will benefit older persons and their caregivers. I am sure we are all eager to learn more about these new technologies.

19. There are many other talks and workshops throughout the month covering other areas such as Wellness, Arts, Sustainability and Careers. Participants will get to meet and engage peers, as well as distinguished professionals and industry experts in gerontology.

Conclusion

20. Let me once again thank NLB and SUSS for collaborating to put together this meaningful series of programmes.

21. As all of you would be aware, Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong launched the Forward Singapore exercise a couple of months ago. The intent of this exercise is to bring society together and remain united as one people as Singapore emerges from COVID-19. It is a timely opportunity for us to refresh our social compact – especially in a much more uncertain world in the future. As part of this Forward Singapore exercise, we want to bring different stakeholders together – not just the Government, but also community partners, civil society, individuals, experts in academia – to look at important issues confronting Singapore and how each of us can play a role to make Singapore a vibrant, inclusive home for all Singaporeans, including future generations.

22. In the spirit of Forward Singapore, I look forward to hearing from the various speakers and participants, including Prof. Philp, Dr Ng and Assoc. Prof. Ma, on how we can collectively build a more inclusive society for all Singaporeans together.

