

# 960,000 enrol in Healthier SG in first year of programme

60 per cent are aged 60 and above, with the rest between the ages of 40 and 59

#### Zhaki Abdullah

Diagnosed with diabetes and high blood pressure, IT administrator Kenny Lee said visits to the general practitioner (GP) for his conditions previously would include "old school" advice such as reminders to take his medication, as well as to eat less and stay away from fatty foods.

However, this changed when he enrolled in preventive healthcare initiative Healthier SG about a year ago, said the 45-year-old.

Through the scheme, his GP referred him to a health coaching service, where a consultant held detailed discussions with him about his lifestyle and diet, as well as the changes that needed to be made to improve his health.

Mr Lee is one of more than 960,000 people who have enrolled in Healthier SG in the year since its official launch in July 2023, the Ministry of Health (MOH) told The Straits Times in July, describing it as "encouraging progress" for the scheme.

This is an increase of about 10 per cent from May, when Health Minister Ong Ye King told reporters that about 870,000 had enrolled.

About 2.4 million Singapore residents aged 40 and above have been invited to participate in Healthier SG since its launch.

Of the current enrollees, about 580,000 are aged 60 and above - or about 60 per cent of the total - while about 380,000 are between the ages of 40 and 59, MOH told The Straits Times.

Under Healthier SG, people are encouraged to register with a family clinic to take personalised steps towards better health. The scheme also allows people to receive free annual check-ups, nationally recommended vaccinations and health screenings.

Mr Lee is now more active, and

his average blood sugar level has dropped, putting him at lower risk of diabetes-related complications.

The married father of two said he can use the knowledge he has gained under the initiative to take action to keep his medical conditions in check. He also hopes to pass on whatever he has learnt.

"I can work on (my health), and I can also help my friends or colleagues who are in a similar situation," he said.

MOH said in March that more than 1,000 GPs are participating in Healthier SG.

The ministry said in July that it is also seeing more enrollees who have completed their health plan consultations - a personalised programme to help enrollees achieve their health goals - with their doctors, but did not provide figures.

"This is an important step for residents to understand how to better manage their health and health conditions, and we will continue to encourage all enrolled residents to go for their health plan consultation and have regular annual check-ins with their doctors on how they can take charge of their health," it said.

Improvements will also be made to the health plan, such as including more specific lifestyle recommendations, to better support residents in taking action towards achieving these health goals.

Healthier SG currently comprises 12 care protocols - covering areas such as smoking cessation and weight management, as well as management of common chronic conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

These protocols lay out recommended health screenings, medication and lifestyle adjustments, as well as when specialist attention or acute care is required.

"From early 2025, we will be expanding the range of care protocols to cover conditions such as stable

ischaemic heart disease and stable stroke," MOH said.

Dr Alvin Neo, a GP at Northeast Medical Group, said Healthier SG benefits both doctors and patients by providing a platform for a more holistic approach to healthcare.

He noted that there has been a slight increase in patient numbers due to the scheme's aim of making drugs for chronic diseases at GP clinics more affordable, with about 20 per cent of his patients now enrolled under Healthier SG.

Madam Ng Kwee Choon, a 77-year-old part-time cleaner who underwent surgery on both her knees in 2018, said she is now able to get medication for her knees, as well as for high blood pressure, at much cheaper rates after enrolling in Healthier SG, making it easier for her to take better care of her health.

The scheme has placed greater administrative demands on GP clinics, such as the need to more systematically track outcome indicators - for example, whether a patient has successfully quit smoking. Dr Neo said: "I think if the different kinds of systems involved can be a bit more integrated, or these kinds of administrative processes can be automated a bit more, it will go a long way to reduce that burden on the provider."

Professor Teo Yik Ying, dean of the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, noted that while the high number of enrolments is a "very good start" to the scheme, there is a need to bring in those who have yet to sign up, who are likely to need the most help in looking after their health.

It is also important to track how many enrollees undergo health checks and heed advice to improve their health, he added.

Prof Teo also suggested that the scheme be expanded to include dental health, as well as be extended to residents of all ages, rather than just those aged 40 and above.

"While preventive health is still of merit for people 40 years and above, we can think about how to extend such services to ensure res-

## Towards living better

Launched in July 2023, Healthier SG is a national preventive healthcare initiative that encourages people to take charge of their health with the help of a family doctor. Benefits of the scheme include a free health plan consultation, as well as fully subsidised vaccinations and screenings.

### NUMBER ENROLLED



### AGES OF ENROLLEES



### CARE PROTOCOLS UNDER HEALTHIER SG

These 12 protocols cover common conditions and lay out recommended health screenings, medication and lifestyle adjustments, as well as when specialist attention or acute care is required.

#### Preventive healthcare

- Smoking cessation
- Body mass index control
- Cancer screening
- Cardiovascular risk assessment
- Adult vaccinations

#### Chronic conditions

- Pre-diabetes
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Lipid disorders
- Multimorbidity - diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol

#### Administrative care

- Health plans
- GPFirst

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idents minimise the accumulation of lifestyle risk factors from a young age, and to inculcate the right lifestyle habits from young."

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