

BUILDING COMMUNITY MENTAL RESILIENCE BY ENHANCING LOCAL SUPPORT NETWORKS

Pilot programme offers an accessible way to equip 900 community leaders and representatives with mental health first aid knowledge

20 May 2017 – Temasek Foundation Cares announced today at its first community mental wellness fair that it has launched the Temasek Foundation Cares – Project eMHFA(S) (e-Learning Mental Health First Aid, Singapore). Together with Changi General Hospital, Project eMHFA(S) aims to build a more resilient community by training community leaders and members of key community groups in mental health literacy through a more accessible e-learning platform. Equipped with mental health first aid knowledge, these ‘front-liners’ who have direct touchpoints with residents and members will be able to help to identify and support people who have or are at risk of developing mental illness.

1 in 10 Singaporeans face some form of mental health disorder. This is as common as persons having diabetes. However, the majority of persons with mental health disorder typically do not seek help or seek treatment early. This could be either due to social stigma or lack of understanding and awareness of the illness. In Singapore, the more vulnerable groups at risk of mental disorders are socially isolated elderly, or elderly without caregivers and low-income families.

Mental disorders can be managed effectively with early intervention. Project eMHFA(S) aims to build up the capability of the community to identify and support people in their neighbourhood who may be facing mental health challenges. With the community more equipped with mental health knowledge, upstream prevention and intervention can be done to help the vulnerable maintain their mental wellbeing.

Mr Richard Magnus, Chairman, Temasek Foundation Cares, said, “Mental illness can isolate those who are afflicted with it. They may feel despair and purposeless as a member of society and even to their families. We can help to break this cycle of isolation and emotional pain, and even enrich their lives. Temasek Foundation Cares seeks to establish and encourage connections so that those in our society who are able to, can form a natural support community for those in need. We can make a life by what we give.”

The Mental Health First Aid (MHFA Singapore) course is a two-day on-site learning course which may deter many from participating due to the amount of time needed to attend the course. The new online platform blends e-learning with face-to-face practicum, thus reducing the on-site learning component to just 0.5 days. Participants will be required to complete an online self-learning module before attending the 0.5 day contact learning session conducted by MHFA(S) certified instructors, where participants will learn how to apply the e-knowledge to provide initial help and guide that person to professional help where necessary through customised case studies and role-plays.

Through the course, the participants will learn about the signs and symptoms of common mental disorders such as depression, anxiety disorders or obsessive compulsive behaviors and the ways to approach and offer assistance. On completing all the requirements, the participant will be certified a Mental Health First Aider.

“We are glad to be able to partner Temasek Foundation Cares to broaden the reach of our Mental Health First Aid programme to include those who work in the community, as they are often the first line of support for those who are at risk of developing, or who are already living with mental health problems. With early and appropriate help, those with mental health challenges will be better able to navigate life’s ups and downs,” said Dr Lee Chien Earn, Chief Executive Officer, Changi General Hospital.

Persons interested to learn the course must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Singaporeans and Permanent Residents aged 25 years and above
- Secondary 2 education (Proficient in English) and above
- Minimum 2 years’ service as a community leader or frontline staff
- Belong to an eligible community organisation, e.g. grassroots organisations, unions, associations, Faith-Based Groups, Self-Help Groups, VWOs, elderly care facilities, etc.

Under the Temasek Foundation Cares – Project eMHFA(S) programme, the person will also need to attend a refresher training six months after the completion of the course. All certified Mental Health First Aiders will have to commit to being activated and apply their skills in appropriate platforms.

The pilot programme aims to train 900 leaders and representatives from community organisations such as grassroots organisations, unions, associations, faith-based groups, Family Service Centres, Senior Activity Centres and Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs). Since February this year, twenty community leaders and volunteers from the Henderson-Dawson Constituency were among the first groups of persons to have been trained in Project eMHFA(S). Other groups that have been trained include representatives from Faith-Based Groups and the Ministry of Social & Family Development.

Project eMHFA(S) complements the Government’s efforts to raise community awareness and support for people with mental challenges so that they can continue to lead meaningful lives and contribute to society. Leaders and representatives from the community groups who are certified after passing the course will be part of a Central Registry of trained individuals, so that they can be mobilised if needed to provide assistance during a crisis.

Temasek Foundation Cares has committed \$578,000 to the Project eMHFA(S) programme over a three-year period.