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New institute will consolidate SMU's ageing-related research and drive an interdisciplinary agenda to build resilient and opportunity-rich longevity societies and economies

SINGAPORE, April 16, 2026 /PRNewswire/ -- Singapore Management University (SMU) has launched the SMU Longevity Societies and Economies Institute (LSEI) which will focus on the economic and societal transitions needed for economies and societies to continue thriving despite an ageing population.



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In the first row onstage during a samba performance at the launch of SMU Longevity Societies and Economies Institute (LSEI): (L-R) Interim Co-Director of LSEI Prof Paulin Straughan; Founder and MD of Ageing Asia Janice Chia; SMU President Prof Lily Kong; Ms Indranee Rajah, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, Second Minister for Finance and Second Minister for National Development; SMU Provost Prof Alan Chan and Interim Co-Director of LSEI Dr Cheong Wei Yang.

The Institute was launched on 14 April by Ms Indranee Rajah, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, Second Minister for Finance and Second Minister for National Development, at the World Ageing Festival 2026, organised by Ageing Asia with SMU as the Co-host and Academic Pillar Partner.

Singapore is already a super-aged society today. By 2030, one in four Singapore citizens will be aged 65 and above. Across Asia, rising life expectancy and smaller birth cohorts are reshaping labour supply, healthcare demand, retirement adequacy and community support systems. LSEI has been established to examine these shifts systematically and generate evidence to support economically sustainable and socially inclusive responses as part of an integrated systems redesign.

Advancing SMU's ageing research to real-world impact

SMU LSEI builds on the University's established track record in ageing research, including the Centre for Research on Successful Ageing (ROSA) and the Singapore Life Panel®, one of the world's leading high-frequency panel surveys tracking financial and well-being outcomes.

By consolidating existing initiatives into a coordinated, university-level platform, the Institute will also focus on translating deep research into actionable insights for government agencies, employers, financial institutions and community organisations. SMU has committed a multi-year budget of more than S\$10 million to seed and sustain LSEI. In addition, the Institute aims to secure external research funding to grow its partnerships and research programmes aligned with national objectives articulated in the recently launched Research, Innovation and Enterprise (RIE) 2030 Plan.

By integrating these strengths with expertise across economics, business, social sciences, law, accountancy and computing, LSEI creates a structured research agenda focused on the social, institutional and economic implications of longer life expectancy.

Noting that institutions need to keep pace with longer lifespans, SMU President Professor Lily Kong pointed out that 'a three-stage life – learn, earn, retire' no longer describes how most people actually live. "We have built systems that still treat later life primarily as a phase of care and cost; escalators move a little too fast; digital forms that assume one has an employer; font sizes no one quite asked for; and retirement policies written when 65 was considered a long life indeed," she observed in her speech.

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"Taken together, they communicate something: the designed world could afford to catch up with the lived world. Many of us still adjust to the news that we are living to 90 – and indeed 100 – intending to remain very curious, productive and engaged for much of it. This is the gap that the LSEI that we are establishing today will help to close," she said.

Growth opportunities of the silver economy

The Interim Co-Directors of the new Institute are Dr Cheong Wei Yang, SMU Vice Provost (Strategic Research Partnerships) and Professor of Sociology (Practice) Paulin Straughan. Dr Cheong served as Deputy Secretary for Technology at the Ministry of Health before joining SMU, and still serves concurrently as their Senior Advisor for Health Economics. Professor Straughan is also the Director of SMU's Centre for Research on Successful Ageing (ROSA).

Dr Cheong said the establishment of LSEI is vital to tackling the profound impact of population ageing, which has far-reaching economic consequences. "However, it also presents significant growth opportunities via the silver economy," he said. "We should not see ageing as only a cost, such as healthcare, but instead as an economic and social opportunity if we approach it as an integrated systems redesign. Through LSEI, SMU is taking a more strategic approach to understand these shifts, and work with partners to translate research into innovative solutions, to support a more resilient and inclusive society and economy in Singapore, and across Asian cities."

The Institute seeks to study longevity, not only from health and care perspectives, but also through the lens of labour productivity, purposeful engagement and economic impact. It also examines how businesses and the marketplace should respond, as well as the importance of mental, social and financial well-being, beyond physical health.

Two research pillars to address economic and social adaptation

LSEI's research agenda is organised around two core pillars:

- Building Longevity Economies examines how labour, markets, retirement systems and fiscal frameworks adapt to ageing populations. This includes workforce participation among older adults, employer practices and incentive structures, retirement adequacy, and market opportunities for the silver economy.
- Cultivating Holistic Well-being adopts a life-course approach that studies preventive health behaviours, financial preparedness, social participation and mental resilience shaping ageing outcomes. It focuses on how policies and community systems strengthen individual support across different stages of life.

Supporting these pillars are research efforts that examine legal, regulatory, technological and behavioural dimensions of longevity, including the adoption of digital and assistive technologies and the policy conditions for their responsible deployment.

New insights into retirement, social connection and quality of life

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An example of ageing-related research in SMU is one highlighting the complexity of retirement transitions. Professor Straughan and her team's recent research on 'Retirement and its impact on the social connectivity of older adults in Singapore' finds that retirement reshapes social connections and sense of purpose differently for men and women.

Drawing data from over 10,000 adults aged 50 to 80, the study reveals that while social participation increases after retirement, retired men experience a more pronounced decline in meaning and contribution compared to retired women. The findings point to gaps in policy and community support system design, particularly in supporting male retirees' transition into later life.

Professor Straughan said that retirement represents a 'pivotal life course transition' which may also disrupt one's sense of identity and purpose, particularly within the Singapore context. Empirical evidence from ROSA's Singapore Life Panel shows retirement impacts different dimensions of older adults' social lives differently.

"While retirees report increased participation in activity and gendered expansions in different aspects of their social networks, they also experience a decline in perceived social contribution," she observed, adding that this points to an important area for intervention to help retirees find a sense of purpose in later life.

Partnerships to strengthen policy-practice integration

LSEI has also established strategic partnerships with five key stakeholders in government, community and private sectors, guided by our ambition in the SMU2030 Strategic Plan to deepen connections with government and industries to solve complex problems.

LSEI will work with the Agency for Integrated Care, Lions Befrienders, St Luke's ElderCare, Singlife and Workforce Singapore. The goals include conducting joint research and initiatives supporting community-based care and ageing outcome, holistic well-being and resilience, retirement readiness, and how to harness the talents of mature workers.

This will boost the feedback loop between evidence, implementation and social and economic institutional design.

The issuer is solely responsible for the content of this announcement.