

## How to Help Singapore's Older Adults Cope with COVID-19's Endemic Phase

*Research by SMU's Centre for Research on Successful Ageing (ROSA) uncovers several ways where we might help older adults to thrive and grow as the pandemic evolves*

**Singapore, 2 September 2021 (Thursday)** – A pandemic such as COVID-19 resulted in mandatory social distancing to prevent infection and increased risks of isolation, but Singapore's older adults have also reported how friends, family and co-workers rallied to help them in these times of need. Many also illustrated how they were resilient in adapting to the pandemic, which is one of the key findings unveiled by **SMU's Centre for Research on Successful Ageing (ROSA)** in its report titled, "Growth and Resilience During COVID-19: The Impact of the Pandemic on Older Adults in Singapore". This report was made possible with the generosity of The Ngee Ann Kongsi.

The report served as a compilation of the research that the centre had conducted on older adult well-being in the past year, but also presented new findings from a series of focus groups that the centre had run to learn more about how older adults have coped during the pandemic. The focus groups were conducted with Singapore Life Panel® (SLP) participants aged 56-75 (inclusive) in 2021. A total of 7 focus groups were conducted, with 35 participants in total.

The findings from the focus groups served to contextualise trends that had been observed in previous surveys run by the centre. For instance, the pandemic had led to interruptions in healthcare provision, but older adults previously surveyed remained surprisingly satisfied with their health. The focus groups revealed that many older adults had benefited from the shift to working from home by adopting exercise routines with their free time that improved their health conditions.

As Singapore transitions into the new endemic phase, where the country eases COVID curbs, ROSA's research aims to gain a better understanding of the 'ageing Singaporean', and to spotlight ideas to support and improve their well-being. The report thus also highlighted several developments made at ROSA to this end, including the recruitment of a younger sample for the SLP aged 50-55, and the expansion of the scope of study at the centre to include new topics.

Full details of the report can be accessed [here](#).

"As we move into the endemic phase of COVID-19, it is important for us to do a stock-take of what we have learnt from the pandemic so far in order to help older adults transition into this new phase. It is also important to recognise the many ways that older adults have demonstrated resilience in the face of the pandemic. Only in doing so can we adopt the right strategies to proactively enable older adults to not just adapt, but flourish as we move forward," said **Professor Paulin Straughan, Director, ROSA**.

### Key findings and recommendations:

- 1. Older adults have been innovative in coping with the pandemic.**
  - In terms of economic well-being, older adults in the SLP did indeed face significant challenges due to losses of income. In the face of such challenges, many older adults were resilient and found innovative ways to overcome these challenges.

- Some older adults have opted to adapt to the changes by, for instance, picking up new skills by going for courses or starting online businesses to generate new sources of income (Refer to Pages 14-17 of the report for details).
- Income support programs should be made available to those who experienced a loss of income so as to improve economic well-being among older adults.

**2. The pandemic so far has not been all bad for older adults in Singapore**

- A seemingly perplexing trend that was observed: While the pandemic disrupted the provision of chronic care for older adults who are suffering from chronic ailments, respondents' satisfaction with health remained constant.
- The increase in work life balance due to the shift to working from home enabled some older adults to adopt healthier lifestyles and exercise routines, leading to improvements in their health conditions.
- This brings attention to a more general point on the need to try to learn from the pandemic in terms of how we can improve older adult well-being even after the pandemic ends (Refer to Pages 17-19 of the report for details).

**3. Social support is important in more ways than one, including networks of neighbours**

- Many older adults cited that their friends, co-workers, and family have been important in helping them learn how to adapt to the pandemic, for instance in teaching them how to use communications platforms like Zoom to keep in touch with their friends and family.
- Others raised how their children stepped in to do grocery shopping for them during the lockdowns as it was safer for younger people to leave the house.
- Interestingly, networks of neighbours were also important for some, as some older adults reported setting up group buy schemes with their neighbours to save on delivery costs.
- All of these different examples illustrate for us both how important social support and networks are in times of need, as well as the many different ways in which such networks can help us during such times (Refer to Pages 20-22 of the report for examples).

**Looking Ahead:**

The past year has very much been defined by, and for good reason, the COVID-19 pandemic. The unprecedented nature of the crisis and its effect on the well-being of older adults in Singapore made it paramount for ROSA researchers to study it in efforts to support policymakers in handling the unanticipated developments that came about as a result.

The ROSA team made significant contributions to this end, and will certainly strive to continue doing so as the pandemic and its effect on our lives continues to persist. That being said, as society adapts to the 'new normal' and as Singapore learns to treat COVID-19 as 'endemic' rather than a 'pandemic', the ROSA team plans to expand the scope of research on the 'ageing Singaporean' beyond pandemic related issues.

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### **About the Centre for Research on Successful Ageing (ROSA)**

ROSA is a multidisciplinary research centre based in SMU. It was established with an MOE Tier 3 social sciences research grant, as well as the generous support of The Ngee Ann Kongsi. Research at ROSA seeks to define and measure a holistic construct of well-being and to identify the factors that impact Singaporeans' well-being as they progress through the later phases of life. Through close collaboration with government and other partner agencies, ROSA also aims to translate research insights into policy innovations that advance the well-being of older adults holistically and promote successful ageing in Singapore. ROSA brings together a diverse team of leading international and local researchers in ageing and age-related issues from various disciplines. Through empirical evidence derived from a longitudinal methodological approach, the multidisciplinary and multi-institutional research team advances propositions that promote successful ageing in Singapore.

### **About Singapore Management University**

Established in 2000, Singapore Management University (SMU) is recognised for its disciplinary and multi-disciplinary research that address issues of global relevance, impacting business, government and society. Its distinctive education, incorporating innovative experiential learning, aims to nurture global citizens, entrepreneurs and change agents. With more than 11,000 students, SMU offers bachelors, masters and PhD degree programmes in Accountancy, Business, Economics, Information Systems and Computer Science, Law and Social Sciences, and executive development and continuing education programmes. Through its city campus, SMU focuses on making meaningful impact on Singapore and beyond through its partnerships with industry, policy makers and academic institutions.

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