

THE NGEEN ANN KONGSI-IPS CITIZENS' PANEL ON YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

INFORMATION KIT



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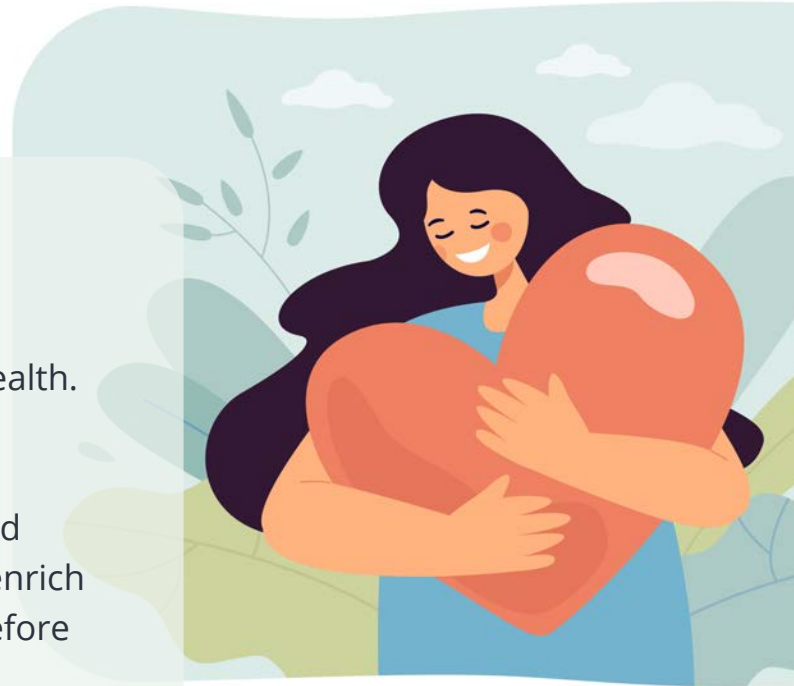
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CITIZENS' PANEL ON YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Thank you for participating in this Citizens' Panel on youth mental health.

This information kit is designed to provide you with some background information, context and data to enrich your discussions. Please read it before the first session.



During the Citizens' Panel, you will come up with solutions to the challenges surrounding youth mental health. You will also hear from Expert Speakers and consult with Resource Persons to get feedback on your proposals.

This Citizens' Panel will provide a safe and inclusive space for everyone to express their thoughts and opinions on the topic freely. Please be respectful in your interactions and discussions with one another. In the event of any difficulties or discomfort, please contact any of the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) or Republic Polytechnic (RP) staff — see contact information on pg. 2.

We wish you a fruitful discussion!

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION



SESSION DETAILS

SESSION	DATE	TIME	LOCATION
1	19 March (Sat)	10am to 1pm	Zoom (Link to be sent in email ahead of the sessions)
2	22 March (Tue)	6pm to 9pm	
3	24 March (Thu)	6pm to 9pm	
4	31 March (Thu)	6pm to 9pm	
5	7 April (Thu)	6pm to 9pm	
6	12 April (Tue)	6pm to 9pm	
7	16 Apr (Sat)	10am to 1pm	TBC



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1. CHALLENGE STATEMENT

The Citizens' Panel aims to: (i) identify underlying factors that contribute to the rise in mental health issues among youths in Singapore; (ii) develop new ways to build greater mental resilience among youths to face adversities and uncertainties in the future; and (iii) provide opportunities for youths to co-create and implement policy solutions regarding mental health and mental resilience.

The Panel will focus on the following challenge statement:



AS A COMMUNITY, HOW CAN WE IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH AND MENTAL RESILIENCE AMONG YOUTHS IN SINGAPORE?

WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

Mental health is more than just the absence of mental disorders. It is a state of wellbeing in which an individual realises their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to contribute to their community. Mental health is fundamental to our collective and individual ability as humans to think, emote, interact with one another, earn a living and enjoy life. [1]



WHAT IS MENTAL RESILIENCE?

Mental resilience, also known as psychological resilience, refers to the ability and skills of a person to adapt to, "bounce back" or recover from adversity, stressful situations and events that they face in life. [2]



2. MENTAL HEALTH: A PRESSING ISSUE IN SINGAPORE



1 in 7 youths have experienced a mental disorder in their lifetime, according to the Singapore Mental Health Study (SMHS) done by the Institute of Mental Health (IMH), Ministry of Health (MOH) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in 2016. [3]

52%

of youths polled by the National Youth Council (NYC) from April to December 2020 said "mental wellbeing remained a challenge". [4]



In 2020, various discussions with youths found that "mental wellbeing continues to be a top concern" in Singapore. [5]

COMMON REASONS FOR MENTAL HEALTH STRUGGLES AMONG YOUTH IN SINGAPORE:

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC:

Social isolation, disruption and uncertainty have worsened youths' mental wellbeing. **53%** of youths surveyed in NYC's polls felt anxious over the future. [6]

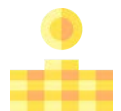


ACADEMIC AND WORK PRESSURES:

40% of youths felt stressed over school and work. [7] Home-based learning posed an additional challenge that youths, especially those from lower-income backgrounds, had to grapple with. [8]

STRESS OVER FINANCES AND ECONOMIC PROSPECTS:

41% of youths in NYC's poll felt worried over their finances. [9] **55%** of youths involved in the TODAY Youth Survey in 2021 were pessimistic about their economic situation due to the pandemic. [10]



OTHER STRESSORS:

- Family environment
- School environment (e.g., bullying)
- Managing interpersonal relationships
- Dealing with life transitions (e.g., going to a new school)
- Social disadvantage (e.g., low income)
- Popular culture and social media influence (e.g., cyberbullying, negative impact on body image)



3. DIFFICULTY OF SEEKING TREATMENT IN SINGAPORE

EXISTING STIGMA TOWARDS MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS:



- **44.5%** of students polled in the SMHS attached negative labels to people with mental illness, such as "crazy", "weird", "scary", "stupid" and "dangerous". [11]
- **46.2%** said that they would be "very embarrassed" if diagnosed with a mental illness.
- **22.7%** said they would not want others to know if their relative was mentally ill. [12]

HIGH COST OF MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT:



- Many people still do not seek treatment due to the perceived high costs of doing so, despite existing assistance and subsidies by the government. [13] Such subsidies and waivers are seen as insufficient as they can be easily used within one or two years. For example, **75%** of respondents in the SMHS said that high costs of mental health treatments deterred them from seeking help. [14]
- Those who are particularly affected by this tend to be from lower-income groups or students who may need more mental health services due to their circumstances.

4. KEY PLAYERS DRIVING MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVES IN SINGAPORE



Government Organisations

e.g., Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY), National Council of Social Service (NCSS)



Social Service Organisations & Ground-up Movements

e.g., Stigma2Strength Singapore, PleaseStay



Schools and Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs)

e.g., Secondary Schools, Polytechnics

5. WHAT'S BEING DONE IN SINGAPORE

NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH AND LITERACY PROGRAMMES/CAMPAIGNS:

- MCCY and Health Promotion Board's (HPB) "Brave the New" campaign (August to December 2020) helps individuals cope better and be more willing to seek help from others. [15]
- Ongoing "Beyond the Label" campaign by NCSS aims to address the stigma towards mental health conditions in Singapore. It provides a series of resources (e.g., helplines, videos) for youths and parents. [16]
- HPB's "It's OKAY to reach out" campaign launched in October 2021. In November, it also launched the accompanying MindSG one-stop portal to raise awareness on mental health issues and equip people with the relevant skills to support their loved ones. [17]
- NYC has been conducting mental wellness workshops, dialogues and surveys since 2016 to learn more about the challenges that youths face and how to tackle them.



ENCOURAGING PEOPLE TO CO-CREATE SOLUTIONS THROUGH NETWORKS:

- NYC's Youth Conversations in 2018 invited youths to share their personal experiences and recommendations on how to manage mental health. [18]
- The Youth Mental Well-Being Network was set up in February 2020 to encourage people to develop ground-up solutions to improve youth mental wellbeing (currently handled by REACH Singapore). It currently has 17 projects focusing on various ways to build greater mental resilience among people (e.g., podcasts, Facebook groups). [19] [20]
- Resources for Parents' Support Groups in schools
 - MOE has a mental health resource guide and website to enable parent support groups to better help their children manage. [21] [22]
 - Ground-up movements and NGOs also offer support to parents and caregivers of youths with mental health issues.
 - Stigma2Strength Singapore — initiative by a mother who lost her son to suicide. [23]
 - PleaseStay — initiative by mothers who lost their children to suicide. [24] [25]

5. WHAT'S BEING DONE IN SINGAPORE



MENTAL HEALTH AND LITERACY PROGRAMMES/CAMPAIGNS IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS:

- Revised Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) curriculum in lower secondary in 2021 to include topics such as understanding common mental health problems and where to seek help. [26] [27] All schools also introduced dedicated times and spaces at the start of each term for teachers to "check-in" with students on their mental wellbeing.
- From 2020, polytechnics and ITEs launched new mental wellness curricula created with HPB to raise awareness of mental health issues among freshman and encourage them to seek help early. [28]

EXPANDING CAPACITY OF MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AND PROGRAMMES IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS:

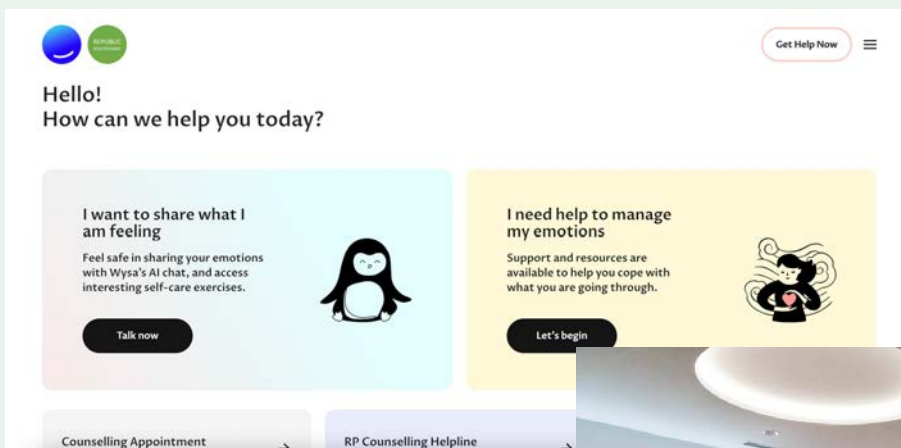
- MOE's efforts in capacity building, skills building and resource building
 - Teachers will undergo "enhanced professional development" on mental health literacy. [29]
 - Increased deployment of teacher-counsellors (from 700+ to 1,000+) in schools.
- Peer support programmes
 - Often offered as a CCA or part of a leadership programme. [30]
 - All schools will have a student peer support structure by 2022. [31]
 - MOE's vision: "every student to be a peer supporter, forming a strong network of support in their class, CCA or peer group, where they can look out for each other and seek guidance from teachers or counsellors where necessary". [32]



5. WHAT'S BEING DONE IN SINGAPORE

MENTAL WELLBEING INITIATIVES IN REPUBLIC POLY:

- Life skill modules on mental wellness
- Peer support programme for freshmen
- AI chatbot services for students (RP+Mindline.sg)
- Self-help resources on dedicated RP Student Life Portal
- Monthly thematic wellness education and outreach programmes (e.g., talks, webinars, contests and roadshows)
- Provision of RP counselling support for students who may require the support
- Fully subsidised external counselling support upon RP counsellor's referral



RP+Mindline.sg Chatbot



RP's Student Care Centre

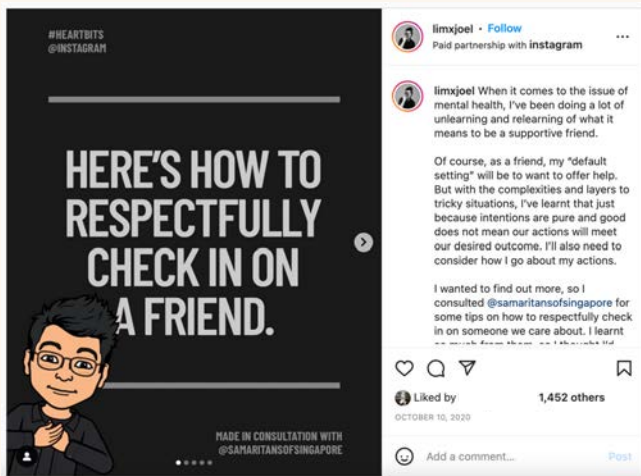
Image Source: Republic Polytechnic

5. WHAT'S BEING DONE IN SINGAPORE



HARNESSING THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA:

Online and social media groups and pages run by youths like Sabrina Ooi (@calmcollectiveasia) and Joel Lim (@limxjoel) focus on important mental health topics and initiatives for their followers.



Left: Joel Lim's (@limxjoel) collaboration with Samaritans of Singapore

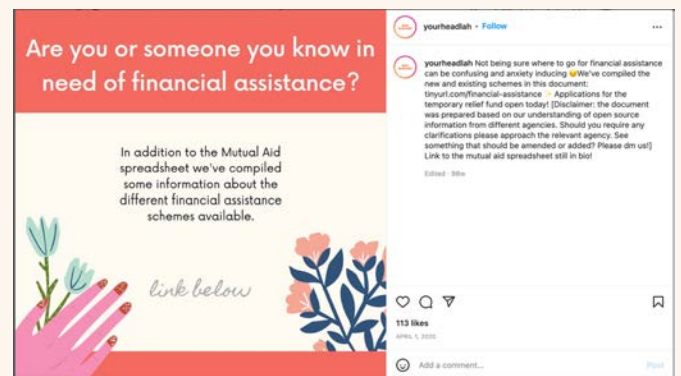
Right: Mental ACT's (@mental_act_sg) Eating Disorder Webinar

Social media platforms have organised initiatives relating to mental health.



TikTok Youths for Good (in partnership with MCCY, MOE and NYC) [33]

Social media can offer informal support networks and/or assistance (e.g., compiling lists of affordable mental health service providers).



A social media post compiling a list of affordable mental health service providers.



5. WHAT'S BEING DONE IN SINGAPORE



AFFORDABLE & ACCESSIBLE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES:

Over 220 general practitioners and 14 polyclinics in Singapore provide mental health treatment. [34]



MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT SUBSIDIES

Up to 80% of inpatient mental health treatment at most public healthcare institutions can be subsidised using MediShield Life and MediSave. [35] Patients can also enjoy subsidies of up to \$500 per year at participating private general practitioner (GP) clinics via the Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS), for the management of mental health conditions.

MOH reviews existing financial schemes regularly to ensure that the changing needs of Singaporeans are being met. For example, the MediSave annual withdrawal limit for patients with complex chronic conditions was increased from \$500 to \$700 from January 2021. There are also ongoing efforts to work with insurance agencies and stakeholders to "further optimise the coverage process". [36]



6. SINGAPORE'S FUTURE PLANS

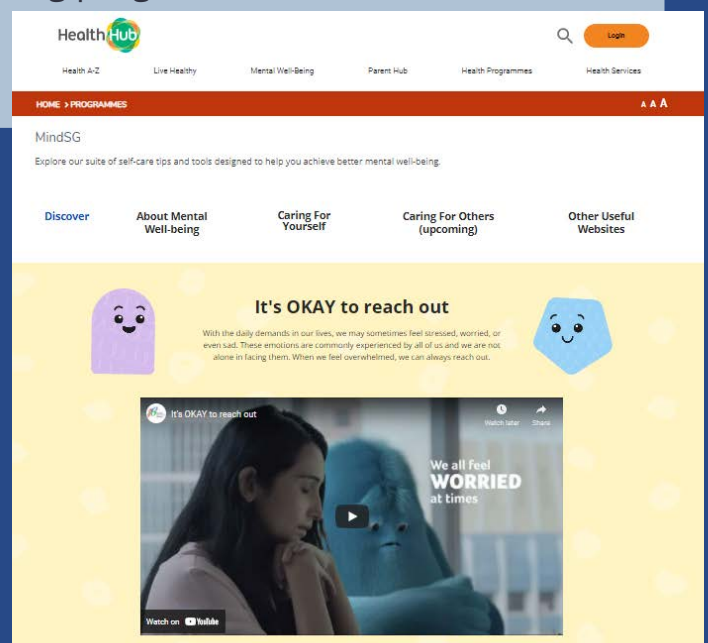
A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

In August 2020, the COVID-19 Mental Wellness Taskforce (CoMWT) was set up to study the psychological impact of the pandemic on people and how to tackle pandemic-induced mental health needs. [37]

A WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT APPROACH

In order to take a “whole of government” approach to this growing crisis, the CoMWT was expanded into an inter-agency platform, named the Interagency Taskforce on Mental Health and Well-being to focus on:

1. Developing a national strategy to guide and align the works of various agencies
2. Developing a one-stop mental health portal
 - This portal, MindSG, was launched in December 2021.
3. Developing a national competency framework
 - To come up with a common set of training standards and competencies expected of those who support people with mental health conditions.
 - Agencies that provide mental health training have already started designing their training programmes based on the framework.

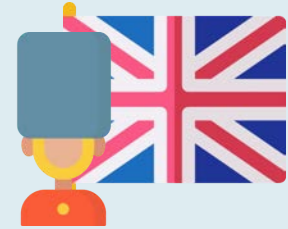


CLICK OR SCAN THE QR CODE
TO READ THE FULL REPORT!



[38]

7. WHAT'S BEING DONE OVERSEAS



ADOPTING A MORE HOLISTIC APPROACH TOWARDS MENTAL HEALTH: SOCIAL PRESCRIBING

WHAT IS IT?

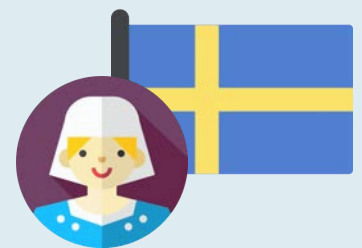
Social prescribing is an approach used in the UK, US and Sweden that connects people with community groups and statutory services for practical and emotional support. It aims to build greater confidence and agency within people to take charge over their own wellbeing. [39]


PHILOSOPHY BEHIND IT?

People's socio-economic backgrounds and environmental factors may negatively impact their mental wellbeing. Prescribing people with "social solutions" can have long-term impacts such as increased confidence, better ways to cope with mental health conditions and an overall reduction of anxiety and depression. [40][41] Moreover, this approach has been welcomed by the healthcare community as creates more collaborations between the wider healthcare system to smaller community and social-based healthcare services. [42]

HOW IS IT CARRIED OUT?

An experienced member of the local agency (e.g., healthcare professional) will assess and individual's condition. If the individual is suitable, they will be referred to a "link officer". This link officer will speak with the individual and learn more about the root cause of their problem. They will consider the different types of socio-economic or environmental factors that contribute to the problem. Next, link officers will refer the individual to relevant community groups, support groups or activities (e.g., recommending someone with social anxiety to go for art workshops). Through this, link officers hope to build the relevant skills in individuals to manage their conditions.



 **WANT TO FIND OUT MORE? CLICK OR SCAN THE QR CODES!**

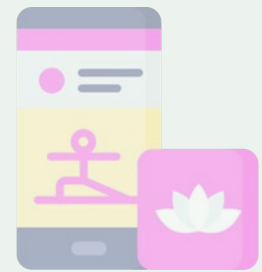


[43]



[44]

7. WHAT'S BEING DONE OVERSEAS



DESIGNING FREE AND ACCESSIBLE MENTAL HEALTH CONTENT AND DIGITAL APPS



FREE WELLBEING SUPPORT VIDEOS IN THE UK

UK's Government Action Group announced in August 2021 that summer schools and Holiday, Activity and Food clubs around the country can access a series of free wellbeing support videos. This series of videos, co-created by Dr Alex George, the government's Youth Mental Health Ambassador, offers tips and tricks to improve children's mood in a positive, energetic way. The series, which aired throughout the summer of 2021, aims to highlight the importance of being physically and mentally healthy. [45]

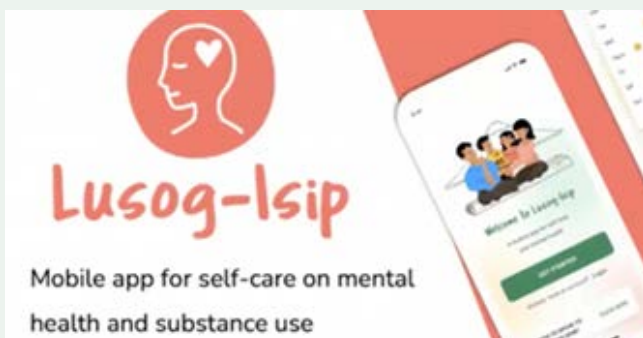
CANADA'S MENTAL WELLBEING WEBSITE AND APP

In April 2021, the Canadian government launched the Wellness Together Canada (WTC) website. It connects people to peer support networks, social workers and relevant healthcare professionals. Through confidential phone calls or chat sessions, people get relevant information to address mental health and substance use issues. The accompanying PocketWell app was launched for smartphone users in 2020. The app has an average of 30,000 users monthly. [46]

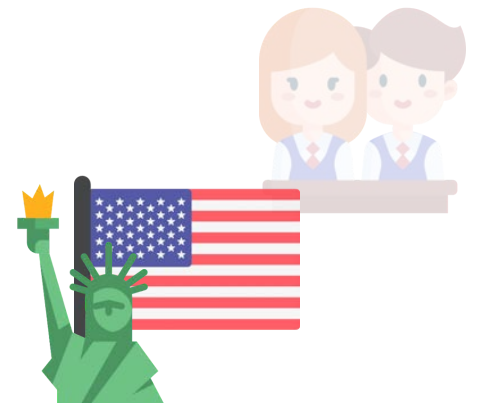


OTHER APPS AND DIGITAL SERVICES:

Philippines' Healthy Minds (Lusog Isip), India's YourDost, Japan's Awarefy [47] [48] [49]



7. WHAT'S BEING DONE OVERSEAS



IN SCHOOLS: MENTAL HEALTH LEAVE

Academic pressure is a major cause of mental health issues among youths globally. More students and parents have been calling for schools to allow students to take mental health days off, similar to leave taken for conditions like fever, flu or physical injuries.

- A new law was passed in Illinois in January 2022 allowing students to take up to five days of mental health leave, without a doctor's note. [50] Schools will also monitor students who take multiple days of mental health leave. School counsellors will reach out to the families of these students to assess if more help needs to be provided.
- Similarly, in 2018, Utah revised its definition of valid reasons for being absent from school to include mental health issues. This was done to encourage and normalise taking leave for mental health issues. [51]



AT WORKPLACES: PAID MENTAL HEALTH LEAVE AND SHORTER WORKING DAYS



- More companies have also introduced paid mental health work leave for their employees. For example, in April 2021, LinkedIn gave its 15,900 full-time employees a paid week off. Others like Cisco and Thomson Reuters have also introduced "company-wide mental health days." Such paid leave is important as it not only reinforces the need for people to take breaks but also incentivises them to do so. [52]
- Major companies, like Panasonic in Japan, have offered staff a four-day workweek to help create a stronger work life balance among its staff. [53] A shorter work week has been shown to increase productivity, efficiency and subsequently reduce burnout. [54]



[55]



[56]

WANT TO FIND OUT MORE? CLICK
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