

Pioneers package Part 2? 'It'll depend on next generation'

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TO THE many Singaporeans who have asked if the \$8 billion Pioneer Generation Package (PGP) will be expanded in future to benefit more seniors, Social and Family Development Minister Chan Chun Sing's reply is: "Frankly, we hope that we can."

But any introduction of a "PGP 2" will depend on how the next generation answers two questions, he said yesterday at a dialogue during the Institute of Policy Studies' annual Singapore Perspectives conference.

Mr Chan described these as: "Will we have the means? Will society have the same values (as now) to want to honour those who contributed?"

More importantly, the package - which eases the medical costs of the first generation of Singaporeans - cannot be a political promise, added Mr Chan.

Singapore must avoid a situation where subsidies and policies "turn into an auction in the elections", he said in reply to a question posed to him and Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean.

"We have seen this happen all over the world. To get elected, somebody will stand up and say, 'I promise more,'" said Mr Chan.

The only way to guard against this is to have an enlightened electorate that asks tough questions of political parties making such election promises, he added.

At this, Mr Teo quipped that, at 60 years old, he is among those who just missed the cut-off for the PGP. Looking to Mr Chan, who is 45, he joked: "You know what to do if you want my vote."

MediShield Life, the proposed universal health-care plan that is another major reinforcement of Singapore's social safety nets, was also brought up.

National University of Singapore professor Paul Tambyah welcomed the scheme but noted that an ailing senior would need his children to use their Medisave accounts to pay the deductibles. This could wipe out the children's Medisave savings, and become a problem that snowballs as each generation has fewer children.

Mr Teo replied that all countries have such inter-generational transfers, except some are "anonymous" in that younger people are taxed to pay for the health-care costs of the older generation.

"When you do it within the family, I think that's a much more natural and organic way," he said. "We should not, by socialising (costs) too much, remove that inter-generational responsibility within families."

The session wrapped up the full-day conference at Raffles City Convention Centre, which also featured two panel discussions on history and economics and a debate on pragmatism. About 900 people attended the conference.