

5 Must-Knows from Singapore Perspectives 2018

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1) "65" is no longer a relevant benchmark for retirement

65 may be the official retirement age but it is increasingly becoming an irrelevant figure, said Mr Laurence Lien, chairman of philanthropic organisation Lien Foundation.

More seniors are working past their 60s and contributing meaningfully to the economy than ever before. In 1999, the labour force participation rate for residents aged 65 and above was 12.4 per cent. But in 2017, the figure doubled to 25.8 per cent. In other words, seniors are increasingly contributing to the economy beyond traditional notions of age.

For those returning to the working world at a later stage in life, these numbers are heartening. When age is not viewed as a barrier, employees have greater impetus to upgrade themselves and improve their skills. Stay-at-home mothers, for instance, may also be more encouraged to rejoin the workforce. This is one way to manage Singapore's labour scarcity, said Mr Ravi Menon, Managing Director of the Monetary Authority of Singapore.

Mr Lien also proposed that Singapore adopt best practices from another silver nation, Japan, to adapt to an ageing population and create an inclusive environment for seniors. One such example was the [Ibasho Cafe](#) in Japan where elders were made to feel at home while also serving as contributing members of society.

2) Ageing is a global phenomenon, but Singapore is well prepared

The ageing challenge is a global phenomenon affecting many countries around the world, but compared to our regional and international counterparts, Singapore has better safeguards in place, said Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean.

The Government has put in place strong foundations and initiatives targeted at preparing Singaporeans for the ageing population. These included the Central Provident Fund (CPF) and Medishield, introduced as early as the 1980s. Both initiatives were recently enhanced through CPF Life and Medishield Life.

DPM Teo added that the right approach was not to dwell on the negatives, but also to focus on the positives and that longevity would be a bonus if we were well-prepared for it. This included maximizing the benefits that technology had to offer, for instance, through the redesigning of jobs in the gig economy for more flexibility to allow seniors to take part. The society must also adopt an open mind-set and make a concerted effort to help seniors stay relevant in the workforce.

3) A cross-disciplinary approach to solving a complex issue

Population challenges are both complex and multi-faceted. And that's why we will need a multi-disciplinary approach to meet the challenges ahead, said Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat.

He noted that older Singaporeans face a variety of issues, from loneliness to retirement adequacy, with the issues often cutting across government agencies. He called for greater collaboration amongst different agencies and Ministries to tackle such issues in a cross-disciplinary manner.

DPM Teo added that businesses, employers, community and individuals would need to take a concerted approach to help seniors age well, for instance, by valuing and tapping on the experience of seniors in the workplace.

Seniors too, have a part to play in ensuring that they stay up to date on latest industry happenings apart from improving themselves with the relevant training and skillset.

4) As tensions rise between young and old, sustainable immigration might help manage them

As Singapore ages, the country could face new tensions arising from the different needs of the young and the old.

One key arena in which this is playing out is in the rising costs of healthcare, said Ambassador-At-Large Chan Heng Chee. Higher healthcare expenditure could start to put a strain on government finances, which could then result in higher taxes.

She cited a recent IPS survey which revealed that a large group of respondents were undecided if they were for or against the idea of contributing higher individual taxes to foot the costs of higher social spending on seniors. Singapore might one day reach a tipping point where younger Singaporeans demand a reduction in benefits to older citizens, she said.

To manage intergenerational tensions, Prof Chan highlighted the importance of a sustainable immigration strategy, which would help to stabilize population numbers and ease the load off of the younger generation. But this should be carried out in a manner that would keep the Singaporean identity intact without eroding the country's core values and beliefs, she stressed.

5) Quality, not quantity when it comes to foreign labour

Singapore must continue to remain open to foreign talent to remain competitive. But instead of focusing on how big the foreign workforce should be, it is increasingly important for us to delve deeper and examine the type of skills they can bring to the economy, said Mr Menon.

The injection of foreign labour should be done in a way that maximises job and wage opportunities for Singaporeans, he said.