

## More Studio Flats for The Elderly Coming Up

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HDB cites good demand for smaller, affordable units as S'poreans age

THE Housing Board will continue building 30-year lease studio apartments reserved for seniors, as such compact and affordable units have proved popular with older Singaporeans.

The HDB will launch 'a few hundred' studio apartments each year in different estates, and not just in mature ones, said Mr Yap Chin Beng, HDB's director of estate administration and property department, at a forum on ageing yesterday.

The forum, organised by the Tsao Foundation, looked at the challenges and possible solutions in housing and other issues facing Asia's ageing population.

With about one in five flats owned by people aged 55 and older, and given Singapore's rapidly ageing population, the HDB has introduced various flat types targeted at seniors before.

But response to these flats, such as multi-generation units, which are four- and five-room units with self-contained annexes for the old folk in the family, was poor, Mr Yap said.

He added: 'We found that many buyers did not want to house their parents. They just wanted a bigger flat.'

He said the HDB built about 400 such units before pulling the plug on them. In contrast, most of the 2,400 or so studios built, or being built, since their launch in 1998, have been snapped up.

Such units can be bought only by Singaporeans aged 55 or older and applicants' household income must not exceed \$8,000 a month. Singles, too, can apply.

Prices of studio apartments launched in Choa Chu Kang last December range from between \$58,000 and \$66,000 for a 35-sq m unit to \$72,000 and \$80,000 for a 45-sq m flat.

A larger studio is the size of a two-room flat, said Mr Yap.

These flats come with elderly friendly features such as non-slip flooring and grab bars.

The executive director of HSR property group said studio apartments are popular because of their elderly friendly facilities and their low prices.

Mr Eric Cheng said: 'Most people we spoke to can afford to buy a \$60,000 or

\$70,000 flat just by using their CPF savings. They don't have to fork out any cash from their pockets.'

A Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports survey of 44- to 61-years-olds released last Friday shows that housing preferences among older Singaporeans have evolved, with three-quarters of some 3,000 baby-boomers wanting to live on their own in their old age.

The study's authors, Associate Professor Angelique Chan and Dr Yap Mui Teng, said this suggested that today's baby-boomers value their independence and privacy. They could also be more wary of the likely tensions of living with their children's families.

Another key issue among seniors is how much income they have to live on after retirement or in their old age.

To address these concerns, the HDB has also introduced policies to enable the elderly to 'unlock' the value of their flats.

For example, in its lease buyback scheme, the HDB will buy back two- or three-room flats from owners who are aged 62 and older, and allow them to live in their flats for 30 more years.

The scheme, which starts this year, involves shortening the flat's lease to 30 years, with the HDB paying the owners the value of the foregone lease.

Dr Yap Mui Teng is a senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies who leads the institute's work in demography and family. Her research interests include policies on the aged.