

New PAP group to champion ageing issues

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Today, 9 December 2013

In view of a greying population, the People's Action Party (PAP) has set up a new interest group to champion issues related to ageing.

Formed at the suggestion of party activists, who felt the need for a “voice” for senior citizens, the group — named PAP Seniors Group or PAP.SG — has identified three areas it wants to tackle: Advocating on the behalf of seniors issues such as their quality of life, care and security; increasing the rate of volunteerism among the elderly; and strengthening engagement of its senior party activists so they can mentor party officers.

It will also work with the PAP Community Foundation (PCF), which has long been associated with childcare, to pilot new solutions for eldercare needs.

PAP.SG, which was announced by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong yesterday at the party's biennial convention, will be headed by a 14-member executive committee chaired by Speaker of Parliament Halimah Yacob. The other members include nine Members of Parliament (MPs), three former MPs — among them former Minister of State for Community Development, Youth and Sports Yu-Foo Yee Shoon and former Minister of State for Defence Koo Tsai Kee — and two grassroots leaders, with Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong serving as adviser.

Senior citizens were also mentioned in the PAP's new party resolution — its first new resolution since 1988. Speaking at a briefing for reporters on Saturday, Mdm Halimah said the new resolution makes a “clear shift of focus” to social development.

“I hope (people) do see ... that we are really aware of the needs and challenges we face,” she said.

While the issue of the elderly's needs has always existed, the population profile is changing, with one in five to be aged 65 and above by 2030, compared to one in 12 now.

“I think that's the gravity of the situation we are dealing with and I suppose those (the elderly's needs) are the things that weigh very seriously on the minds of our activists,” she added.

Commenting on the move, Institute of Policy Studies Senior Research Fellow Gillian Koh said: “Since there's a youth movement, it is also sensible to have a seniors' movement which (deals with) very specific issues, such as the employability of seniors and cost of living — specifically (that of) healthcare. But, of course, all of these are integrated into one political movement.”

Mdm Halimah clarified that PAP.SG is not a separate wing like the PAP's Women's Wing or Young PAP, with its own membership base.

“As a movement, we want to mobilise people who are like-minded and who can support our efforts.”

Mdm Halimah said her committee is “still thinking through the modus operandi” of the group and would look at issues such as healthcare security.

“We would like to make some representations to the Government on what we feel ought to constitute stronger healthcare security for our seniors ... In my view, it will be good for us to conduct a focus-group discussion with our seniors,” she added.

Mdm Halimah also noted the low rate of volunteerism among younger seniors — those aged between 55 and 64 — and said the group hopes to improve this trend.

The group will leverage on its 87 branches as “network touch points” to reach out to the elderly.

Meanwhile, Mr Lee gave an update on the Pioneer Generation Package first announced at this year’s National Day Rally, saying it would “focus especially on their medical needs” and that details would be announced during Budget 2014 in February.