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Title : Centre for Third Age to be set up by June to promote active ageing
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SINGAPORE: The Minister in charge of Ageing Issues said social support for ageing in Singapore is relatively under-developed so more would be done to help seniors become self-reliant and independent.

Mr Lim Boon Heng said as a start, the Council for Third Age, which is supported by a Centre for Third Age (C3A), would be set up by June.

The Centre will get government funding and resources to champion active ageing.

C3A will occupy the 10th floor of Junction 8 in Bishan.

It will act as the nerve centre to organise activities and programmes for seniors, and help them network and make new friends.

C3A will take over the responsibility for Senior Citizen's Week, and administer the GO! Fund on behalf of the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS).

The Centre will also hold regular dialogues with seniors to hear their views and recommendations on active ageing, and present them to the government.

The first dialogue will be conducted with REACH as the partner. Other dialogue sessions could include the National University of Singapore Society Senior Circle.

Speaking at a symposium on positive ageing organised by the National University of Singapore Society (NUSS), Mr Lim said the biggest problem facing the elderly is loneliness.

So while the government looks into hardware policies like barrier-free accessibility and a holistic, affordable healthcare and eldercare system, centres like C3A will promote the heartware side of helping seniors lead active, purposeful lives among friends and family, and within the community.

He said: "One way is for seniors to conduct courses, based on their knowledge, expertise and skills. Increasingly, seniors will want to pursue further studies because they are interested in the subject, not because they want to find work.

"Can those seniors, who have left the tertiary institutions, conduct these courses at reasonable fees? Seniors who attend classes will stretch their life savings, while the lecturers will be compensated by being useful to society."

Turning to retirement issues, Mr Lim said he is personally ambivalent about having a retirement age.

He said the government would encourage Singaporeans to work for as long as they could, and for as long as they want to, not just for their own financial security, but as part of active ageing.

Mr Lim said: "We talk about re-employment. We'd encourage, make it easier for people to work longer and when we've successfully gone through this transition, then the term 'retirement' will be history.

"I don't think that we should think of retiring although if you speak to a younger audience today, those in their 30s, they say, 'Oh, I don't want to work so long. By the age of 50, I want to retire and enjoy life.' I think many of us felt that way before, until you get there and you say, 'What am I going to do!'.

"So I think we're all wiser. We shouldn't retire. We should all actively engage in something - whether it's for income or just to pass time!"

Some participants called on the government to do more to help seniors who cannot look after themselves, while others felt more could be done to dispel the negative perception of growing old.

Dr Kanwaljit Soin, Chairperson and Founder of Women's Initiative for Ageing Successfully, said: "I think only the lucky grow old! Because if you're not lucky, you'll die! Make being old a legitimate and respectable part of life. In fact, young people should aspire to be old. And if they're lucky, they'll get there!"

- CNA/so

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