

**OPENING ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT HALIMAH YACOB  
AT THE SINGAPORE MENTAL HEALTH CONFERENCE 2019  
ON WEDNESDAY, 30 JANUARY 2019 AT 9.00AM  
AT MAX ATRIA, SINGAPORE EXPO**

**Key Messages**

- President's Challenge 2019 will be raising funds for 67 benefitting organisations spanning a wide range of service sectors
- 11 programmes are supported under ELF this year
- PC 2019 will also build on the positive momentum of the 40 percent increase in its youth volunteerism rate to rally more young Singaporeans to volunteer
- The Empowering for Life Fund (ELF) will fund each approved project for up to three years. This will give beneficiary organisations time and space to try out new approaches that may prove to be more effective in supporting the vulnerable in our midst

Ms Anita Fam, President of the National Council of Social Service

Dr Gerard Ee, President of the Agency for Integrated Care

Mr Chew Hock Yong, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Social and Family Development

Mr Robert Chew, IMH Institutional Committee Chairman

Mr Zee Yoong Kang, CEO of the Health Promotion Board

Prof Chua Hong Choon and Ms Tina Hung, Co-Chairpersons of the SMHC2019 Advisory Committee

Distinguished Guests

1 A very good morning. Let me begin by wishing everyone a happy Lunar New Year in advance!

2 I am glad to see so many industry experts and stakeholders gathering today to share best practices on how we can better support persons with mental health conditions.

3 The theme for today's conference, "Empowerment for Resilience and Recovery", is a timely one. Just last month, the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) released the results of its 2016 Singapore Mental Health Study. This nation-wide study found an increase in the lifetime prevalence of common mental health conditions, with one in seven adults experiencing a mood, anxiety or alcohol use disorder at any point in their lifetime, up from one in eight in the same study conducted in 2010.

4 What is of even greater concern is that many of them – about three quarters – did not seek help. This is worrying because it is a vicious cycle – when they don't seek help, their condition

deteriorates; and by the time they do come forward, their condition may have worsened and recovery becomes more challenging. So a key question is, why are those with mental health conditions not coming forward to seek help? I suspect stigma is one possible reason. The fear of being ridiculed or treated differently can deter individuals from seeking help.

5 As Barbara K. Lipska who wrote a book “The Neuroscientist Who lost Her Mind”, said, “we still judge brain malfunctions as if they are character deficits, reflecting on a person’s value rather than the result of physical processes gone awry”.

6 We therefore need to do more as a community to break this vicious cycle. We should let those with mental health conditions feel comfortable in coming forward to seek help, so that they can be supported in their recovery journey. If an opportunity arises, we can also help them showcase their talents, which many of them possess. Take for example, Mr Sim Kah Lim, who has had schizophrenia since young. I heard that Kah Lim loves to paint – so I invited him to visit

the Istana during a recent Istana Open House. Kah Lim did a beautiful painting of his impressions of that day, and the Istana has featured his designs in our Lunar New Year greeting cards this year.

7 Recognising this need for the community to play a part in helping those with mental health conditions, IMH has over time shifted its model of care from a hospital-based approach to a community-based one. Relevant community partners are trained to support IMH in caring for persons with mental health conditions. An example is IMH's Aftercare Programme, where networks of community partners provide aftercare support to discharged IMH patients, either co-managed with IMH, or right-sited in the care of the community partner.

8 As a nation, we can do even more. This is why I have designated mental health as the focus area of President's Challenge 2019. As the national movement in helping the disadvantaged, President's Challenge 2019 will continue to support a broad range of social causes. But this year, by spotlighting on mental health, I hope

that we, as a community, are more aware of the needs of persons with mental health conditions and can better support them in their journey of recovery and reintegration. I hope that President's Challenge 2019 can bring about new programmes and approaches to help this group of individuals as well as their caregivers.

9 I am heartened that since I announced this focus area for President's Challenge 2019 in October last year, many partners have come up with innovative ideas on how to better help those with mental health conditions. One example is the Singapore Anglican Community Services (SACS), who have submitted a proposal on a Transitional Employment and Work Integration Programme (TEWIP). The programme aims to help persons with mental health conditions who are not yet job ready to re-enter the workforce, but can benefit from real world work opportunities within SACS's internal work units and social enterprises. These exposures will be useful in helping the beneficiaries build job stamina, and act as a bridge for them to eventually gain open employment.

10 One beneficiary who will benefit from TEWIP is 52-year-old Mr Li Hee Meng. Hee Meng was diagnosed with schizophrenia after the closure of his fish business, which had a significant impact on his mental health and confidence in life. After being referred to SACS, Hee Meng underwent psychiatric and vocational rehabilitation at the Anglican Care Centre (ACC) (Hougang). Thanks to his Employment Specialist, Hee Meng was recently able to successfully transit from vocational training to part-time employment, and will be starting a new job as a storekeeper soon. Hee Meng will continue to receive employment support under TEWIP, in his journey towards open employment.

11 This year, the TEWIP is one of 11 programmes that will be supported by the President's Challenge Empowering for Life Fund (ELF). All of these programmes will look into empowering a different group in our society, including persons with disabilities, children with special needs and disadvantaged women. The ELF programmes will support each of these groups by equipping them with the necessary skills and resources to proactively solve problems,

develop resilience in overcoming life's challenges, and contribute meaningfully to society.

12 I am glad that SACS has moved in this direction to try a new model of supporting the recovery process of persons with mental health conditions. I am also pleased that the other ELF programmes will similarly be pioneers in exploring new models of employment support for their different groups of beneficiaries.

13 Of course, as with all pioneering work, we can expect that they will need time and space to develop and grow. I am therefore pleased to announce that starting this year, the Empowering for Life Fund (ELF) will fund each approved project for up to three years. I hope that with this assurance and certainty of funding support over a longer period of time, our VWOs will be open to try out new approaches that may prove to be more effective in supporting the vulnerable in our midst. If these new approaches work and are sustainable, we can consider mainstreaming them subsequently.

Ladies and Gentlemen

14 Last year, President's Challenge raised over \$13.7 million for 59 benefitting organisations. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our donors for making this possible. This year, we will be raising funds for a total of 67 beneficiary organisations, spanning a wide range of service sectors from family and youth services to eldercare, from healthcare to rehabilitation. I hope our partners will continue to show us your strong support, so that together we can create a more caring and cohesive society in Singapore.

15 President's Challenge 2019 will also continue to rally Singaporeans to do our part for the disadvantaged in our midst. Last year, over 40 volunteering activities were organised in support of President's Challenge. I am heartened that this has led to a 40 percent increase in youth volunteerism. We should continue to build on this positive momentum to promote volunteerism in Singapore, to nurture a compassionate Home for all.



16 Ultimately, President's Challenge is a national movement for Singaporeans to do good together. It is about our fellow citizens working with one another, to build a better future for all. I look forward to the many meaningful President's Challenge activities in the new year. Thank you.

\*\*\*\*\*