Who is looking after the elderly?

Growing old: Should you be worried?

The crunch comes when 24-hour nursing is needed. or if you are independent but too frail to be at home

Janice Tai and Toh Yong Chuan

Home. Nursing home. Hospital and services from homecare company community hospital. Ageing in Comfort Keepers, and the non-pro- done to care for the seniors of the fuplace. Mrs Theresa Hogan, 88, has fit Tsao Foundation helped link her ture, and whether those moves are experienced them all over the past up to services in the community fast enough to meet demand.

The widow was living with her was clean and its nurses took good Hospital. care of her. She also enjoyed attending its exercise and flower arrange-

The cons: She was lonely, even alone – what the Health Ministry Minister of State for Health Amy leased last year: "We need to plan

nine other people. Mrs Hogan re- Neighbours cook or buy lunch for calls: "It was dull. The people there her every day couldn't really communicate, and my family hardly visited. I would lie on my bed, just looking at the sky

After five years, she went to live with a grandson who managed to obtain a two-room rental flat in Whampoa. She had housekeeping and monitor her well-being.

outside the window."

Which was just as well. Over the son when she suffered a stroke that past two years, the frail grandmothtook away her ability to walk or eat. er has had five falls at home, and ing societies in the world: by 2030, building more centres where sen-So, she was put in a nursing home. had to be warded at Tan Tock Seng one in four people, or more than iors can get physiotherapy or take The pros: She liked the place as it Hospital and Ren Ci Community 900,000 people, will be aged 65 part in activities.

Then, four months ago, her granddecided to continue living at home fect the future of Singapore, Senior details of the national plan were re-

form of eldercare service.

BEST PLACE TO GROW OLD IN?

Singapore is one of the fastest ageand above, double the number now. Ageing is the single most importhe Ministerial Committee on Ageson died of lung cancer. Mrs Hogan tant demographic shift that will afing Gan Kim Yong said when initial

though she slept in a room with (MOH) terms ageing in place. Mrs Hogan's situation of multiple aspects of care in her senior years is

> ple here is projected to need some Against the current backdrop of

5,000

By 2030, one in every three peodifferent settings in which to grow Khor said earlier this year when old, Insight looks at what is being

10,000

Growing healthcare capacity

Community care places Seniors receiving care at

ahead to ensure that Singaporeans launching a \$3 billion Action Plan need not worry about getting old, for Successful Ageing.

The plan's 70 initiatives to help the elderly lead healthy and active lives include a review of the financing system for long-term care, raising the re-employment age and

Health Minister and chairman of

2011 capacity 2015 capacity Projected 2020 capacity SOURCE: MINISTRY OF HEALTH SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

> but instead embrace new opportunities that come with longevity. We want Singapore to be the best place for Singaporeans to grow old in, and a model for successful ageing." Yet a recent survey of 1,000 Singaporeans, commissioned by NTUC

Income and the Lien Foundation,

found that eight in 10 Singaporeans are worried about growing old. Topping their worries is whether they will be able to look after themselves. Financial concerns such as

running out of savings comes next.

This is even as the traditional Asian approach of caring for aged parents at home is still the "retirement plan" for most. However, the best-laid plans can fail when the elderly need round-the-clock specialised care for illness. Some people also do not have family members to rely on or cannot afford a maid.

Last month, Mr Gan said Singapore will need to make "deep and undamental changes" to the way care is delivered to seniors, as the country ages and more of its citizens suffer chronic ailments. The Government's focus has

been shifting from hospitals to the community - such as polyclinics, nursing homes and daycare facilities – to let the elderly be cared for at home and in familiar neighbour-There has been much discussion says there is a

of ageing issues over the past 20 need to plan vears, and from the early 2000s, ahead to ensure MOH has been investing heavily in Singaporeans expanding home-based care ser- embrace new vices. But are there adequate community resources to ensure the eld- that come with erly can keep living at home? Despite the years of discussion, long- term private and public residential care options for the elderly

For many frail elderly people who live with family without the necessary time or nursing expertise, or for those living alone who are unable hire a full-time helper, nursing homes remain their main option.

LONG-TERM CARE: ENOUGH BEDS? In barely three years, there will be Health Amy Khor 610,000 people in the above-65 says ageing is age group, but a projected capacity the single most of only 6,200 centre-based day- important care and 10,000 home-based care demographic

As of last year, Singapore had 26.1 affect the future nursing home beds per 1,000 peo- of Singapore.

pected to be ready this year.

ple aged 65 and above – the lowest proportion in 15 years (see chart) and well below the OECD average of 45.2 beds. To put that in perspective,

though, researcher Radha Basu notes in her 130-page report on the state of nursing homes here: "With fewer beds than many advanced countries and relatively stronger family networks, it is no surprise that Singapore has very few older folks in nursing homes."

But she cautions: "As families

shrink in size, Singapore will need more long-term care options." In countries like the US, Australia and Finland, about 5 per cent of the elderly population live in some form of residential aged care facility such as nursing homes or assisted living. Going by this, about 50,000 seniors in Singapore will need such facilities by 2030. But

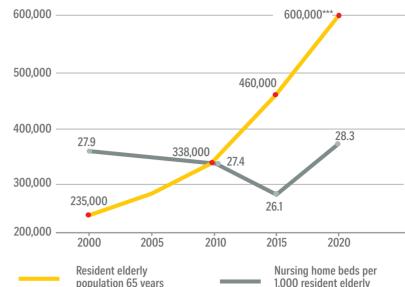
nursing homes. This means that even if 95 per cent of the elderly live and die at home, Singapore may need nearly 50,000 alternative senior living options by 2030, says Ms Basu.

there are only about 12,000 beds in

When The Sunday Times asked MOH how it comes up with its planning targets for services and facilifor aged care services is projected adjust our development plans." based on a combination of factors. the incidence of disability, the level tion of assisted living, which is com- It is clear that the more than of disability and utilisation rate.

"Needs are also not static. In tan-

Nursing home beds for fast-ageing Singapore



NOTE: * Population Trends 2015, Department of Statistics Singapore **Computed based on nursing home beds data from Ministry of Health, Singapore **Scenarios of Future Population Growth and Change in Singapore, Demography and Family Cluster, Institute of Policy Studies, National University of Singapore Source: LIEN FOUNDATION AND KHOO CHWEE NEO FOUNDATION SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

were not ramped up more and earli- change and so we will conduct regu- cept can take the form of people er, a spokesman said the demand lar reviews of our projections and continuing to live in their own HDB For those who do not need intenservices in their neighbourhoods. She explained: "Beyond the popusive nursing care but are too frail to lation of seniors, we also factor in age in place at home, there is the op-

old & above*

mon in countries such as Australia, 900,000 seniors by 2030 will have "As the needs and circumstances Britain and the US. They provide a different needs, financial capabiliof seniors and their caregivers are more home-like environment, such ties and expectations which no sindifferent, we have to plan for a dias private rooms, for more indegle player or model can possibly cahas come to mean anywhere that verse range of options to meet the pendent seniors who need help ter to. A wider range of options will with personal care. be called for

There are few such standalone fa-

flats but having access to aged care

65 years old & above

The authorities acknowledge the jantai@sph.com.sg dem with changing social trends, cilities here, though the Govern-challenges that lie ahead.

LONG-TERM CARE OPTIONS NEEDED

With fewer beds than many advanced countries and relatively stronger family networks, it is no surprise that Singapore has very few older folks in nursing homes. But as families shrink in size, Singapore will need more long-term care options.

RESEARCHER RADHA BASU, in her report on the state of nursing

"We agree that we should seek to enhance the diversity of aged care options and we welcome more ideas to help our seniors age well in place," says the MOH spokesman. "We hope we can see new and exciting models emerging to meet our seniors' needs, that are uniquely

As for Mrs Hogan, when The Sunday Times tried to visit her, she was back at a community hospital after ties for the elderly and why they utilisation of different options will ment says the assisted living con-busting her hip in yet another fall at home. She clutched a soft toy rabbit everywhere she was wheeled to.

"My great-granddaughter gave it to me last month for my birthday and I also have a bear, tortoise and doll on my bed at home (in the Whampoa flat). I can't sleep here without the rabbit," she says. For Mrs Hogan, then, the "home" to grow old in and die in

Ageing in place: More support for seniors living at home

for at home or in the community. ed to rise by 45 per cent from the ranks of people turning grey. comfortable in familiar settings 10,000 by 2020. and around people they know.

tre-based daycare places rose by dementia – allow seniors with shrinks. care services in their homes in- be able to age well at home.

67 per cent, and seniors receiving mild or moderate disability to still To cope with heavy caregiving

social activities, will jump from However, the capacity to proseniors better. But that pool of laple as 'others'."

needs, the MOH has started pilot- foreign domestic workers.

The key thrust of Singapore's age- 3,500 last year to 6,200 in 2020. vide daycare and home-based bour is dwindling, with source ing policy is based on the view Likewise, the capacity to care for care services remains minuscule countries limiting supply and that most people want to be cared seniors in their homes is expect-compared with the vast, growing maids less keen to work here.

That's because they feel more 6,900 available last year to The number of elderly living rest of the community will need to alone increased from 6,000 in fill the gap, experts say – pointing Daycare centres and home- 1990 to 29,000 in 2011 and is esti- to volunteers. Tsao Foundation, a And that is why the Ministry of based care services – such as meal mated to reach 92,000 by 2030. non-profit group that specialises Health (MOH) has ramped up delivery, medical escorts, person- Disability rates among the elderly in ageing issues, has more than aged care services significantly of al and nursing care, rehabilitation are expected to rise, even as the 120 trained volunteers who help late. Over the past five years, cen-and "elder-sitting" for those with number of family caregivers regularly in counselling and organising activities.

"Volunteers make a critical conwork, Singaporeans have been actribution to the care of our elderly creased by 82 per cent, says the For those with more complex customed to outsourcing care to clients," says Ms Doris Low, director of community relations at The ministry intends to keep ing integrated care packages this The MOH piloted a programme Tsao Foundation. "(Volunteering) up this momentum. The number year that bundle both home- last year to train domestic helpers is also one way in which we can of daycare places, where older based and centre-based care to -both in the classroom and on the support one another in an ageing people go for rehabilitative and serve needs of seniors holistically. job – so that they can look after society instead of seeing older peo-

Nursing homes: Mega, multi-storey facilities

For the past few months, motor- Singapore has around 12,000 ists driving along Ang Mo Kio Ave-nursing home beds, up from nue 1 near Bishan-Ang Mo Kio 9,200 in 2010. Another 5,000 will Park would have seen the new be added by 2020, an increase of Ren Ci Nursing Home taking 85 per cent over 10 years. shape. When the 11-storey build- By financial year 2015, the Goving is completed around next ernment was spending \$360 mil-

beds and blood-pressure measurmore than three times what it ing machines have replaced desk spent in financial year 2011. and dusters at a former primary The pressure to ramp up capacischool. The Pearl's Hill Care ty rapidly has led to two heavy-Home, which officially opened in weights – the Government and September, is Singapore's first the National Trades Union Congovernment-run nursing home. gress – jumping into the segment From constructing new build- to run their own nursing homes. ings to refurbishing old ones, Sin- By next year, Kwong Wai Shiu gapore is expanding the number Hospital will have Singapore's of nursing home beds in a hurry. largest nursing home in a new

June, it will house up to 470 resilion on nursing homes, most of it for patient subsidies, manpower Meanwhile, in Chinatown, costs and construction. This is

pore is churning out cookie-cut- censing requirements. Nursing ter nursing homes with soulless homes were given one year – enddormitory-style wards. Pearl's Hill Care Home, for ex- Loh Shu Ching, chief executive of ample, has four large halls for 32 Ren Ci Hospital, notes: "The residents each. The Ministry of ENHS will definitely provide saf-Health, which runs the home, de- er care for the nursing homes but

12-storey hub that will see a dou- "Dormitory living and regimentbling in its number of beds to 622. ed routines are the norm. Resi-An 11-storey, 342-bed home in dents have little control over their Chai Chee run by NTUC Health daily routines and there is mini-Co-operative and a 290-bed malprivacy."

shift that will

being built in rush to increase number of beds

who has published research pathe nursing home into a home

pers on nursing homes here, says: and not a hospital."

Health Minister

home in Hougang run by Thye Meanwhile, the MOH has tried Hua Kwan Moral Society are ex- to improve the quality of care in Such massive projects have led new Enhanced Nursing Home observers to ask whether Singa- Standards (ENHS) as part of lied April this year - to comply. Ms clined Insight's request for a visit. it is going to make things more dif-Dr Phillip Yap, a geriatrician ficult for those of us trying to turn

Assisted living facilities: Govt integrating services for seniors within neighbourhoods The elderly in Singapore have Singapore. The small pockets that such estates in Singapore," says care centres and rehabilitation

grow frail and need someone to es for assisted living.

about 5 per cent of the elderly pop- dents do not get help with daily ac- ronments for seniors. In Marine ping, for seniors who require asulation live in some form of residentivities. Senior group homes are Terrace, Jalan Batu, Nee Soon Censistance. A senior activity centre 12,000 nursing home beds now. they are familiar with. a more home-like environment, says assisted living is a service Second, it is including senior ser- have also taken the initiative to exsuch as private rooms, for more in- worth studying. "Many citizens vices in new public housing devel- periment and come up with assist-

with personal care. lic housing estates. Therefore, as-Standalone assisted living op- sisted living takes the form of in-Standalone assisted living takes the form of inwith personal care. tions are virtually non-existent in jecting a range of services within ous eldercare services such as day-

hardly any other housing options exist are mostly nursing homes its spokesman.

are located. besides nursing homes if they that have set aside separate spac- The Government seeks to inte- The MOH is also encouraging grate services within neighbourprivate operators and voluntary While Singapore has 14 senior hoods in two ways. First, it has welfare organisations to provide In countries such as the United group homes, they do not count as been retrofitting existing mature assisted living services, such as States, Australia and Finland, assisted living facilities as resi- estates to create conducive envi- housekeeping and grocery-shop-

tial aged care facility. Going by this clusters of rental flats meant to let tral and Beach Road, for instance, at a new studio apartment develestimate, about 50,000 seniors in elderly folk with little or no family there is a range of services and fa- opment in Marsiling has been of-Singapore will need such facilities support live together with one ancilities – including an active ageing fering residents nearby health by 2030. But there are only about other in an environment which centre, community kitchen, senior and dental check-ups, and taking activity centre and day rehabilitagrocery orders. Assisted living facilities provide The Ministry of Health (MOH) tion centre – within the same area. Nursing homes like Peacehaven

dependent seniors who need help own their own homes within pubopments. New Housing Board ed living spaces for more mobile

'I'd rather die than go to a home'

Toh Yong Chuan

A stroke in May last year did not kill Mr Goh Keng Char, but the depression that followed almost did. Before the stroke, Mr Goh, then 77, lived alone in a one-bedroom Housing Board rental flat in Toa Payoh. His flat-mate of over 10 years had died a year earlier. When he was discharged from Tan Tock Seng Hospital after a sev-

en-week stay, Mr Goh, a bachelor, felt lonely and helpless, having to use a wheelchair to move around. "I cannot walk... I felt I had nothing to live for," says the former water tank maintenance worker.

the block in my wheelchair and wanted to jump down. "A Malay neighbour saw me in a daze and stopped me. He saved my

thinks about taking his life. "I have Goh apply for government funding sector. many new friends in the neighbourto buy a motorised scooter, and says. "They do not charge me." ganisation (VWO) Touch Home Seow says it provides these ser- Mr Seow.

"I took the lift to the 12th floor of from occupational therapist Doreen Ang, saying she is like family to him. ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

\$ KINNHTOUR

Today, Mr Goh still cannot walk and he continues to live alone at month from the Government. teach him how to use it this year. A nurse visits weekly to check on many prefer to age at home."

iors. It also runs a daily ambulance service ferrying the elderly to hospitals for check-ups.

Touch operates in Ang Mo Kio, Jubecause Mr Goh is on long-term rong and Toa Payoh. It plans to ex-degree in occupational therapy last public assistance, getting \$500 a pand to Bukit Batok and Yishun year and could have easily found

He relies on voluntary welfare orTouch Home Care director Kavin skills and heart for the work," says Care for food, medical care and vices to seniors like Mr Goh as part Mr Goh appreciates the help. "I housekeeping. Twice a day, seven of a larger government drive to have no relatives, so she is like fami-should his health deteriorate, he redays a week, volunteers from help the elderly grow old where ly to me," he says, pointing to occutorts: "No. I'd rather die than go to a Touch deliver lunch and dinner to they live, instead of in nursing pational therapist Doreen Ang, nursing home... I have lived in Toa his flat. "The food is still warm homes. "We recognise that the eld- who accompanied Insight to visit Payoh for more than 40 years and when they arrive," says Mr Goh. erly want to be independent and him last week. Mr Goh had five sib- in this flat for more than 20. I want lings but they have died and their to die here."

Mr Goh appreciates the help he gets living alone. Each month, its nurses to use the motorised scooter, downmake housecalls to about 340 sen- plays her role, saying: "Mobility is mportant for seniors socially, so I helped him get around the neigh-The 24-year-old graduated with a

next year, but it is feeling the heat work in hospitals, but she opted to the rental flat, but he no longer Last December, Touch helped Mr from the manpower crunch in the work at Touch. She says: "I can make a direct impact on the seniors "Manpower challenges continue in a community setting." hood, especially the hawkers," he sent two occupational therapists to to be a concern for us, as it is important to recruit people with the right ised scooter, saying he is no longer

When Insight asked if he would consider moving to a nursing home his health, and staff from the VWO Volunteers from the VWO deliv-children do not visit him.

clean his flat. The services are free er daily meals to about 400 seniors Ms Ang, who taught Mr Goh how tohyc@sph.com.sg

Right at home in

home For the past 16 years, home for Madam Chew Eng Huay has been

a nursing

a chronic sick ward, and then a nursing home. A stroke in 2000 left her unable to walk, talk or feed herself, so she went from her sister's flat to the Ren Ci long-term care facility in Hougang. Eight years later, she was wheeled into Ren Ci nursing home in Jalan Tan Tock Seng where she continued to be bedbound and fed through a tube. The nursing home is made up of

seven single-storey buildings.

Madam Chew, 70, lives with 29

others in one of the cavernous

Her first thought when she was Madam Chew, who is paralysed on brought in was to go back home. her right side, keeps herself busy by go wherever she wanted. Today, home. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN she seems to be a different person. It was barely lunchtime when The Sunday Times visited her two propel the wheelchair forward. weeks ago and "Ah Huay", as she is affectionately called, was already about this place," she said. cooking a pot of red bean soup for Madam Chew may be one of the

dessert. She whips up a sweet treat many residents of the nursing for the residents every Thursday. home, but she enjoys helping the "I cook anything, red bean, nurses run the place. green bean, chrysanthemum or During breakfast, she helps to barley soup," said Madam Chew, feed one of the residents. Then brandishing a ladle as she she transfers herself onto a motorstretched to stir the soup from her ised scooter to go around deliverwheelchair. She carefully scooped ing bedsheets, eggs and bread to up pandan leaves from the pot residents in other wards. After with her left hand, as the right side lunch, she sometimes plays mahof her body is paralysed. With intensive rehabilitation her one good hand. and good care, she is now able to "I need to have things to do. It talk, eat on her own and wheel her- makes me happy," said Madam

She was fearful of not being able to helping the nurses at Ren Ci nursing

"I like it here, I like everything

jong with her close friends using

self around by using her left leg to Chew, who could not sit still even

bean soup or ensure that someone she passes by and another rambles was feeding a certain resident. on about winning the lottery. She said she is accustomed to She has injected her personality hard work as she used to sell cof- into the impersonal space by pastfee and bread at Lau Pa Sat. Later, ing Hello Kitty and other cartoon she also helped her father sell ice stickers on the cupboard next to kacang at his hawker stall in Have- her bed. And she wears red and lock Road.

Swee, which they sold. one finds me even after one or two
The other residents seem listless weeks?" she said in Mandarin. and stay in their beds or chairs. "Even if there are care workers "I used to work so hard in the past who can come to my home to help, and didn't have time to help others. I don't think they are able to do so So this is my form of volunteer

black floral blouses and trousers in-Madam Chew is single and has stead of the green pyjamas that an older sister and an estranged everyone else wears. A nurse from younger brother. Their father left Myanmar, who treats her "like them a three-room flat in Bukit Ho mum", bought the outfits for her. Madam Chew, with her cheerful "I don't like to stay alone at home disposition and active lifestyle, as I am scared. What if I die and no may be an exception in her ward.

every day," she added. She said she does not mind sacrificing personal space and privacy. **Janice Tai**

during this interview. Intermit- One neighbouring resident, she tently, she would check on her red pointed out, scolds her each time

Peacehaven nursing home.

work now," said Madam Chew.

There's

It is only 11.20am but a lunch queue has already formed at an in-house cafe along Upper Changi Road North. In the line are old folk, lean-

They tell the servers the portions they are feeling up to that day. They then carry their plates to nearby tables and join whoever they want to dine with. When they are done, they empty the food waste in a bin and leave the plates and utensils in separate tubs.

are in their 80s and 90s, have de-

mentia. But the people who run the

assisted living facility where they "This is not the kind of place ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN where they just sit there and wait to be served. Giving them a say in simple things matters, because it keeps to wear the same outfit all day.

The home is run by a charity, the Ms Khai.

whenever they want. They are ex-day. If they prefer to rest in their subsidies of up to 75 per cent. pected to change out of their pyjarooms, they may do so. $mas. \ In \ contrast, \ at \ some \ nursing \qquad Before \ going \ into \ their \ rooms \ to \qquad ing \ the \ concept \ of \ assisted \ living \ fa- \qquad \textbf{Janice Tai}$ homes, it is common for residents deliver fresh laundry or remind cilities.

little things and make decisions for have mild to moderate dementia, do point to knock on their doors first three of its 208 beds are in single or

them to shower, nurses make it a Over at Lentor Residence, two in space and privacy.

"These are environmental cues within their "HDB block". Every Jonathan Koh says it was set up as a phine Khai, senior staff nurse of and will put them in the frame of Wednesday, they go to a factory retirement village in 1997. "But mind to get their day going," says across the road for a morning snack there was no demand, so we ran it Salvation Army, but these relative- When Insight visited two weeks walk to the Japanese school next ly independent seniors are housed ago, some were in the cafe, piecing door to say hello to the children. building. Called Hope, the area watched television or read the news- the charity saw a need to provide

prone to wander, they are not kept

In the morning, they wake up of specific activities available each tween \$2,800 and \$4,500 before of a 30 per cent increase in the sense Peacehaven is not alone in hav-

to ask for permission to enter, so as twin-occupancy rooms with atnot to intrude on their personal tached toilets. The floors of the common areas are carpeted and

The home's chief executive

like a nursing home, taking in subsidised residents." A room does not come cheap month. The price includes meals,

laundry and housekeeping services. of well-being after living there.

Toh Yong Chuan



Hope for dementia patients

ing on walking sticks, waiting patiently for their turn.

These elderly folk, most of whom

themselves will empower them. them engaged in life," says Ms Jose-

four-bed rooms.

live believe that getting them to do At Hope, the elderly residents, who not follow a regimented timetable.

next door in a separate five-storey together jigsaw puzzles. Others

Though some of the seniors are there is free Wi-Fi.

at the canteen. Every Friday, they Hope was started in 2006 after \$240 a day, or more than \$7,000 a where they live is modelled after an papers. Another group went into a care that helps relatively independ-HDB block. There are about 60 sen-room to belt out the classics tunes of ent seniors with dementia. Since Ms Khai says that living in a ior citizens with mild to moderate Taiwanese pop singer Teresa Teng. then, about 100 have lived there. home-like environment has helped dementia who live in single or They do not need to follow a regi- They pay the same rates as the nurs- residents enhance their quality of mented timetable, but there is a list ing home residents next door, be- life. Assessments show an average