



## Long term care workers dogged by low pay & limited prospects, shows new study by Lien Foundation

***Singapore's LTC sector is far more reliant on foreign workers compared to other fast-ageing APAC economies such as Australia, Hong Kong, Japan and South Korea. Salaries of both local and foreign LTC workers lowest here, compared with post-tax salaries of peers in the four territories surveyed.***

***Despite rising wages in recent years, LTC support care workers in Singapore still take home less than childcare workers, sales assistants and clinic attendants.***

26 July 2018

1. Singapore needs to grow its pool of long term care (LTC) workers by at least 45 per cent between 2017 and 2020, as more nursing homes, day centres for seniors and home care services are developed to cater to a rapidly ageing population. But low pay, limited prospects and continuing churn in the sector may make it hard to meet this target, shows a new study commissioned by the Lien Foundation, which polled both providers and workers.
2. According to data from the Ministry of Health (MOH), as of March 2017 – the latest period for which figures are available – there were 8,300 LTC workers in direct care roles such as nurses, therapists, doctors, nursing and therapy aides and healthcare assistants. The Ministry hopes to attract 3,700 more such workers to the burgeoning eldercare sector by 2020.
3. The Lien Foundation study estimates that direct care workers form around 75 per cent of the LTC workforce. The remaining 25 per cent work in administration, finance, human resources and other ancillary roles. This works out to around 11,000 workers in the sector for the same period.

4. The study evaluates Singapore's long term care manpower needs and the pay, perks and prospects of its long term care workers in comparison to four other ageing Asia-Pacific economies – Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Australia. Conducted by a leading international consultancy, it is based on an in-depth literature review of Government, academic and private-sector documents, interviews with around 35 care providers in five countries, including 20 in Singapore. The consultancy also conducted a face-to-face survey of around 250 long term care workers and 50 hospital workers in Singapore.
5. Costs of long term care have been in the news of late, with the Government recently announcing CareShield Life, a social insurance scheme, which will provide lifelong and universal protection to severely disabled seniors who need care. Significantly, manpower costs form the biggest chunk of the operating costs of providers, not just in Singapore but also in other advanced nations.

### **Key findings**

6. The study reveals some key insights into LTC manpower policies and practices in the five surveyed economies.
  - Although Singapore has the second-highest (\$4,000)<sup>1</sup> post-tax national median monthly wage among the five territories surveyed and the highest GDP per capita (\$71,000), its long term care workers are the lowest paid. The disparity in wages of LTC workers in Singapore vis-à-vis its four APAC peers is especially wide among support care workers, such as nursing aides and healthcare assistants who make up the bulk of the care work force.
  - Singapore has been trying to wean itself off over-dependence on foreign labour and build up a local core of workers, but this has been tough, given that in a tight employment market, local LTC workers have plenty of better paying jobs to choose from which require similar skills or qualifications. In addition, job hopping is common in the sector. Nearly 55 per cent of the foreign workers surveyed had been with their companies for less than two years and average tenure among them was only 2.8 years.

---

<sup>1</sup> **Australia has the highest post-tax median income at \$4,600 among the 5 benchmarked countries. All salaries in SGD, unless stated. All data for 2016, unless stated.**

Locals have been working in their companies for 4.1 years on average. Significantly, average tenure for local and foreign workers in hospitals – at 7.8 years – was more than double the 3.4-year average tenure for LTC workers.

- Despite more locals joining the sector in recent years thanks to concerted efforts by MOH, foreigners appear to make up around 70 per cent of the direct care workforce in Singapore, compared to 32 per cent in Australia, 10 per cent in Japan and less than five per cent in Hong Kong and Korea.
- Although efforts are ongoing to create a skills and career pathway, promotion opportunities are limited, especially for support care roles in Singapore. Foreign workers often get stuck in these roles as that's where there are the most vacancies.
- On a brighter note, Singapore's long-term care workers receive more on-the-job training, amounting to 75 hours per worker per year, than workers in any of the other countries surveyed. Close to eight in ten workers also felt they were learning and growing in their roles and making a positive impact on the lives of seniors.

7. The Foundation's Director for Research and Advocacy Radha Basu said that the main aim of the study was to find facts and uncover trends with regard to an issue where there is very little publicly available data but is widely acknowledged to be an abiding challenge faced by the sector. "We wanted to piece together a clearer picture of manpower issues in the LTC sector by talking not just to providers, but also workers, including the foreign workers who form the bulk of the direct care workforce but are generally left out of national manpower surveys which poll locals," she said. "Manpower has direct implications not just on the quality of care our seniors receive, but also on costs."

8. Given that the demand for workers in Singapore and in the region will grow, there was a need to decouple aged care manpower statistics from that of the larger healthcare workforce. Places like Hong Kong and Australia release nationally representative studies on eldercare workforce numbers, practices or projections. "There are signs from the ground that the LTC workforce situation in Singapore is better than what it was before," she said. "But in the absence of nationally representative figures, we can never be sure."

### **More being spent on care sector**

9. The Singapore government (Ministry of Health) spent \$800 million on the long term care sector in FY 2016, up from \$600 million the previous year. This includes both capital costs – such as for building new nursing homes – as well as the manpower and other operational costs of running LTC services. However, despite this, Singapore still has relatively low government spending on LTC as of FY 2016 (0.19 % of GDP vs 0.9% in KR, 0.92% in AU, 2.00% in JP and 0.29 % in HK). Only Hong Kong, which has double the number of seniors compared to Singapore, spends less per elderly among the surveyed countries. Unlike Japan, Korea and Australia, Hong Kong and Singapore both have a pool of domestic care workers who supplement the work done by professional caregivers. On average, advanced OECD countries spend 1.4 per cent of GDP on long term care.

### **Pay and promotion the key barriers**

10. The survey results and benchmarking analysis found that Singapore offered its long term care workers a “weak talent value proposition” – the value an employer offers an employee in return for work – compared to the other surveyed countries. Compensation and a relative lack of advancement opportunities are key factors. Local support care workers, who assist nurses and perform personal care chores such as feeding seniors, for instance, are paid an average basic salary of around S\$1,350 per month in Singapore, while foreign workers are paid around S\$850. By comparison, a support care worker can be paid a post-tax salary of S\$3,300 in Australia, S\$3,000 in Japan, S\$1,700 in Korea and \$3,750 in Hong Kong. Significantly, foreign and local workers are protected by minimum wage laws and paid the same in all countries studied, barring Singapore.
11. Compared to hospitals, there are limited promotion opportunities and career pathways in LTC, especially for support care roles. Advancement is especially challenging for trained foreign nurses who come here as nursing aides and face a long process of four to 10 years just to obtain a conditional nursing licence to practise their vocation in Singapore. LTC operators often wait for foreign workers to renew their employment contracts multiple times before supporting them to take up the Singapore Nursing Board certification examinations. Incidentally, the qualification pathways can take just as long in countries like Australia. However, Australia offers higher salaries and also an easier pathway to

permanent residence – and even citizenship – making it a more attractive destination than Singapore.

### **Building a local core**

12. Through additional funds and training opportunities, the Ministry of Health and the Agency for Integrated Care have been helping providers to build up a local core of workers and wean the sector off an over-reliance on foreign workers. But this has proven tough, given not only the nature of the job, but also because the wage rates and work hours in the long term care sector are deemed unattractive to Singaporean workers.

13. Since 2012, salaries in the sector have gone up by at least 30 per cent, thanks to a salary adjustment exercise, where the Government provided extra funding to voluntary welfare organisations that run LTC services to help boost the wages of both local and foreign workers. Yet despite this, compensation in Singapore for support care staff is lower than alternative jobs available for workers with similar qualifications. For instance, at around \$1,350 per month, local nursing aides get paid less than childcare workers (\$1,400), clinic attendants (\$1,738) or sales assistants (\$1,547) in Singapore. The Lien Foundation study also showed that at 50 hours, long term care workers in Singapore clocked the longest hours per week among the countries surveyed, barring Hong Kong (57 hours). Traditionally, locals have also shunned support care jobs because of the physical demands of the job and their unwillingness to perform tasks that are viewed as menial or dirty such as changing diapers of elderly nursing home residents.

### **Top-of-mind concerns of workers**

14. The survey also polled 250 LTC workers on their motivations and top-of-mind concerns about working in the sector. Passion – and the need for a job – were the top two motivating factors for both locals and foreigners to work in the sector. Unsurprisingly, professionals in the sector – such as nurses and therapists – were more dissatisfied with their pay and prospects compared to support care staff.

15. Only 29 per cent of professional staff found their salary to be competitive for the work they did and 36 per cent were satisfied with their promotion opportunities, compared to

43 per cent of support staff. Forty-two per cent of foreign staff are open to leaving Singapore to work in another country.

16. While 80 per cent of workers agree that they have made a difference in the lives of the elderly they cared for and feel that they are learning and growing in their roles, relying on these motivational factors is insufficient, said the Foundation's Programme Director, Gabriel Lim. "It is just as important to look at key issues that cause dissatisfaction such as the lack of competitive compensation and attractive promotion opportunities, and long working hours. It is untenable in the long run to simply rely on the passion and dedication of these workers for their jobs."

17. Care workers, he added, were the unsung heroes of the sector. "They play a crucial role as custodian, companion, and comforter; but often, the greater rewards that come with their roles are not monetary. Even if care is primarily "step-down", there is little reason why we cannot step up to do more in caring for our carers. Whether this is in the form of more equitable compensation or building a structured formal qualification process for the rank-and-file, this is a collective responsibility that we must acknowledge and accept."

### **Competition for foreign workers**

18. Competition for these care workers is heating up. Hong Kong, which has so far had strict controls on foreign workers in the formal eldercare sector, has announced that it plans to liberalise its foreign worker policies, in view of a staff shortage in the sector. In fact, providers say that although minimum wages for a support care worker is around \$2,260 (HKD\$13,000), median pay can be \$3,700 or more for a nursing aide or health worker, because of the shortage.

19. Australia has been also been actively hiring foreign care workers for its aged care sector in recent years, with one 2016 Government study estimating that for recent hires employed a year or less, the percentage of foreign or foreign-born workers has climbed from 34 per cent in 2007 to nearly 40 per cent in 2016. In 2017, however, Australia imposed some curbs on lesser skilled migrants though it remains to be seen whether this will affect care workers.

20. Significantly, the Lien Foundation study found that 42 per cent of foreign care workers in Singapore would consider leaving Singapore to work in another country. Of the four countries surveyed, Australia – where they can earn up to four times more – remains the favourite destination for foreign LTC workers currently working in Singapore. Japan too is stepping up its game to attract foreign carers. According to Japan Government estimates, the country will face a shortage of nearly 380,000 care workers by 2025. The impact is already being felt.
21. The Shinzo Abe Government has already entered into economic agreements with the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam to import care workers, though progress has been slow, primarily because workers need to learn Japanese. The Government has also made efforts to raise the pay of support care workers, which are now around \$3,000, up from S\$2,700 a couple of years ago.

### **Innovations in Sector**

22. Many providers in Singapore are using creative ways to attract and retain workers by making them feel more valued. AWWA, an integrated local operator that runs both day centres and home care services, lets administrative staff and care staff have the opportunity to rotate and pursue operational and management roles. It also proactively reaches out to local communities and structures meaningful volunteering opportunities to attract locals as part-time LTC workers.
23. Active Global Caregivers, a private home care operator, has built its own recruiting network for foreign care workers in source countries such as Myanmar, Sri Lanka, The Philippines, India and Indonesia. It partners with local training centres to upskill workers before moving them to Singapore for work. This recruitment approach is also faster, more targeted and less expensive over time. The company's ethical recruitment practice, which involves direct recruitment, rather than through employment agencies, ensures that foreign care workers need not pay to get a job.

24. The Salvation Army’s Peacehaven Nursing Home has used a combination of job redesign and a clear career pathway to attract and retain local workers. The home’s Executive Director Madam Low Mui Lang, a veteran with more than 27 years’ experience in long term care, remembers a time when it was hard to attract even a handful of local workers to the sector. These days, Peacehaven is drawing many more locals, thanks to flexible hours and an increase in “social care functions” where care workers help residents with therapy or feed them and form social bonds. Equipment such as hoists has also enabled locals to attempt jobs like transferring residents from the bed to wheelchair. “There are new challenges – like the growing demand from other countries – but overall, things are looking up for our sector,” she said. “We should continue focusing on boosting productivity, skills and wages for our workers.”

Download a copy of the findings here: <https://tinyurl.com/LTCmanpowerSG>

#### **Annexes**

- A Recommendations of the LTC Manpower Study
- B Facts and Figures of the LTC Manpower Study
- C Case Studies
  - In Singapore for the long term: Josefina and Andrew
  - The Lure of Leaving Singapore: Joseph Matthew
- D A Long-Term Care Worker in Singapore (Infographic)
- E Manpower Initiatives for the Community Care Sector: Ministry of Health

#### **About the Lien Foundation**

The [Lien Foundation](#) is a Singapore philanthropic house noted for its model of radical philanthropy. It breaks new ground by investing in innovative solutions, convening strategic partnerships and catalysing action on social and environmental challenges. The Foundation seeks to foster exemplary early childhood education, excellence in eldercare and effective environmental sustainability in water and sanitation. It supports innovative models of eldercare, advocates better care for the dying and greater attention on dementia care.

Since 2005, the Foundation has harnessed IT for capacity building and enhanced the quality of care in healthcare nonprofits like hospices and nursing homes, and extended this to person-centred care for long-term eldercare providers in 2017. To advocate better nursing home care in Singapore, the Lien Foundation released [a report](#) featuring the voices of 50 nursing home and eldercare experts that revealed why Singapore’s nursing homes need a new narrative, and showed the reality of life in a nursing home with its social documentary, [Anita’s Nursing Home Stay](#). The Foundation also showcased the rich diversity of Japan’s senior services in a 10-part film series, [Genki Kaki](#). More recently, the Foundation redefined how overlooked and underused physical spaces could be reimaged for the elderly in a book, *Second Beginnings*.



## **MEDIA CONTACTS**

Joanne Sng-Lee  
Qeren Communications  
[joanne@qeren.biz](mailto:joanne@qeren.biz)  
+65 9002 7696

Genevieve Kuek  
Qeren Communications  
[gen@qeren.biz](mailto:gen@qeren.biz)  
+65 9763 3110



## Annex A: Recommendations of the LTC Manpower Study

- Compensation will likely be the most important factor for attracting and retaining talent. Progressive local long-term care operators that were interviewed offer higher compensation than industry average and have offset this increase by focusing on job and process re-design to improve productivity. Increasing compensation has also helped these operators' lower attrition, with workers benefitting from increased motivation.
- Creating clear advancement opportunities is critical to making LTC an attractive long-term career. It is worth implementing a sector-wide skills and productivity-based wage progression pathway – akin to the Progressive Wage Model for the cleaning, security and landscape industry. This is especially important, not just to attract more workers to the sector, but also retain them. Currently, the sector is afflicted by a “leaky bucket” syndrome and tenure rates are very low in long-term care, compared to hospitals.
- Efforts to attract more local workers and build up a local core must be redoubled given that 70 per cent of the direct care workers in the sector are believed to be foreigners. However, foreign workers should also be allowed to access skills competency ladder, given the large number of foreigners in the sector. The Foreign Worker levy could be channeled into funding training and wage boosts for this group of workers.
- An annual wage supplement could be made mandatory for long term care workers. While basic pay has gone up by around 30 per cent in the sector in recent years, some interviewees said some employers have cut other forms of payment, such as a gratuity or year-end bonus.
- The majority of the local support-care workforce is made up of older workers. A tripartite committee has been set up to look at the CPF contribution rates of older workers. Currently, the employer's CPF contribution rate decreases progressively after the worker reaches 55 years of age. The committee could consider delaying this to at least 65 years of age, not just for the LTC sector, but for all low-wage workers.
- More efforts are required to make home care an attractive and viable career. The survey of LTC workers indicates that attrition is highest among home care workers. Average tenure of home care workers was 2.6 years vs 3.3 years for nursing home workers and 4.4 years in day care workers. Some home care employees report feeling isolated in home-care settings without the support of a community of other LTC workers working alongside them, and many report concerns of safety, especially around abuse by the elderly and/or their family members. Government's efforts on strengthening Community

Nursing could help address some of these concerns, by creating a pool of LTC staff working in nearby neighbourhood.

- Integrated LTC operators could provide opportunities for LTC workers to rotate between Nursing Homes, Home Care and Day Care centres, as a means of further career progression, similar to how care staff in hospitals can switch between different wards. Operators could also take a more deliberate approach to professional development of workers, having regular conversations on performance and areas of improvement, as well as frank discussions about their career aspirations and prospects.
- Operators and the government could also adopt new recruiting models, by sourcing and training foreign workers directly in their home countries instead of relying on recruitment agencies as 'middle-men'. Sourcing and training workers directly in their home countries not only helps to save agency costs for workers which makes Singapore more attractive, but also improves the overall quality of workforce and care.
- The LTC sector has an unfavourable reputation of being 'hard and dirty work' with poor treatment of workers, particularly among locals. One way to improve sector quality and reputation is a grading system to rank LTC facilities, similar to what Korea introduced. The government could also consider allowing subsidised seniors to select their LTC providers in order to further incentivise high-performing providers. This approach creates more transparency in the system, helps improve overall quality of the sector, and allows workers to identify and join 'preferred operators'.
- Till recently, even skilled workers in the sector had to leave the country after completing 18 years. This has been extended to 22 years. Given the shortage of experienced workers, there is a need to reconsider this ceiling on visa renewals.
- Some of the suggestions made above are already being implemented in varying degrees. Singapore urgently needs more clarity and concrete data on what is working and what is not.

## Annex B: Facts and Figures of the LTC Manpower Study

### Survey Highlights

#### Do you know ...?

- To meet the demands of its fast ageing population, **Singapore needs to increase its number of long term care (LTC) workers by at least 45%**. According to data from the Ministry of Health, there were 8,300 LTC workers who worked in direct care roles such as nurses, therapists, doctors, nursing and therapy aides and healthcare assistants as of March 2017. It is projected that a further 3,700 direct care workers are needed to reach 12,000 direct care workers to serve 610,000 elderly in 2020.
- **70% of Singapore's LTC direct care workers are foreigners.** Most of them work as support care staff, aiding nurses and therapists and providing personal care.
- The **median basic monthly pay of a local LTC worker** (healthcare assistant)+ is **about \$1,300**, or **close to 30% lower** than what an attendant would earn in a hospital or clinic.^
- The **median monthly pay of a local LTC support worker+** (healthcare assistant or nursing aide) is less than that of a shop assistant or lorry driver. ^

|  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| General office clerk   | \$2,144              |
| Hospital/clinic attendant  | \$1,738              |
| Lorry driver   | \$1,730              |
| Data entry clerk   | \$1,600              |
| Shop sales assistant   | \$1,547              |
| <b>Local LTC support worker+</b>   | <b>\$1,300-1,350</b> |
| Restaurant waiter/security guard/masseur   | \$1,300              |
| Cook   | \$1,200              |
| Petrol station attendant   | \$1,100              |
| Manufacturing labourer/hand packer/F&B cleaner   | \$1,000              |
| <i>+Monthly median pay of LTC direct care worker is derived from the LTC Manpower Study's industry practitioner interviews</i> |                      |
| <i>^ Monthly median pay of all other jobs is based on data from Ministry of Manpower</i>                                       |                      |

- The **median monthly pay of a foreign LTC support worker (healthcare assistant or nursing aide) is \$850**, or at least 35% lower than that of a local LTC worker doing the same work.
- In economies like Australia, Japan, Hong Kong and Korea, **salaries of LTC workers are not differentiated based on whether they are foreign or local staff.**

- **The median monthly pay of an LTC support worker in Singapore is the lowest amongst these Asia Pacific economies** with similar ageing needs. The table below compares the wages of nursing aides. These are tax adjusted and represented in SGD.

|                   |                |
|-------------------|----------------|
| Australia         | \$3,290        |
| Japan             | \$3,000        |
| Hong Kong         | \$3,751        |
| Korea             | \$1,830        |
| <b>Singapore+</b> | <b>\$1,350</b> |

- When benchmarked against these economies, **Singapore's LTC workers spend at least three times as long** (with the exception of Korea) **or an average of 75 hours in training a year** compared to their counterparts.

|                  | Number of hours of training in a year |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Singapore</b> | <b>75</b>                             |
| Korea            | 40                                    |
| Japan            | 25                                    |
| Australia        | 20                                    |
| Hong Kong        | 12                                    |

- **Skills training for foreign workers in the LTC sector is mostly on-the-job training and generally does not lead to certification.** Career advancement opportunities are limited.
- On average, foreign LTC workers surveyed stayed with their current employer an average of 2.8 years.
- **Foreign LTC workers are allowed to stay in Singapore for up to 22 years.** This means that a foreign LTC worker who comes to Singapore at 25 years old will have to leave when he or she turns 47, despite the training and work experience gained, and having another 10 or 15 years to go before retirement.

## Annex C – Case Study I

### In Singapore for the Long Term

Andrew (44 years old) and Josefina (47 years old) are long term care workers who came here from Myanmar and the Philippines respectively to work at The Salvation Army Peacehaven Nursing Home (Peacehaven) in 2000. They have not looked back since. They mark their 18<sup>th</sup> work anniversary at Peacehaven this year, and their 13<sup>th</sup> year of marriage.

Their journey was not easy. It was difficult adjusting to their jobs when they first arrived. Despite being a qualified nurse with a degree in Nursing from the Philippines, Josefina could only work as a nursing aide and she was required to do everything from nursing care to cleaning the toilets. Andrew, who studied Botany, was hired as a health attendant, responsible for showering and meeting the basic care needs of elderly residents.

Like most of the long term care workers who come to Singapore, Josefina and Andrew had intended to leave after completing their first two-year contract here. However, the positive working culture at Peacehaven and the opportunities they were given to upgrade themselves changed their minds.

Fondly referring to Peacehaven as her “work family”, Josefina enjoys being part of the Peacehaven team to conceive and plan new services and activities. She continued to work in the nursing home as she felt valued and trusted as a care professional who could make a positive contribution to the delivery of care at Peacehaven. Andrew similarly appreciates the family-like culture at Peacehaven and the opportunities that he had been given to study and upgrade.

Peacehaven’s forward-looking HR practices allowed Andrew and Josefina to enhance their skills through structured training over time, and gain formal certifications. By 2004, Josefina had taken two qualification exams with the Singapore Nursing Board and became a registered nurse here. In 2012, she continued to receive her pay from Peacehaven throughout her eight-month full-time Advanced Diploma in Gerontology course at Nanyang Polytechnic. Andrew was sent to attend the ITE Certification Course in Health Care and Home Care conducted by Peacehaven in 2002. In 2015, the nursing home sponsored him for a National Institute of Technical Education Certificate (NITEC) in Community Care and Social Services which better equipped him as a professional caregiver.

In 2005, the couple decided to settle down in Singapore as PRs, and in 2009 they became Singapore citizens.

Today, they have two children, aged 9 and 11 and continue to contribute to the long term care sector. Josefina is an Assistant Nurse Manager and oversees four wards at Peacehaven. Andrew is a Senior Care Associate, assisting in the residents’ rehabilitation, physiotherapy and hydrotherapy.

This couple’s journey of making Singapore their home as LTC workers reflects how the sector benefits from dedicated and experienced care workers. It also shows how investment in training and enlightened HR practices can grow the expertise and services needed in long term care.

## **Annex C – Case Study II**

### **The lure to leave Singapore**

Joseph Matthew (35 years old) came from India to Singapore in 2010 and worked for 8 years as a staff nurse in one of Singapore's largest nursing homes.

He enjoyed his work caring for the elderly. It reminded him of his grandparents whom he took care of till the end of their lives. Joseph also wished very much that his family of two children and wife could join him. However, he knew the difficulties of getting permanent residency status in Singapore.

He decided to leave Singapore when he found a job as a registered nurse for aged care in Auckland, New Zealand. It was a tough decision because Joseph had already integrated well into the organisation he was working with in the time he was here.

Even though his current salary in New Zealand is lower than what he got in in Singapore, he will be able to apply for permanent residency in a few months and start arrangements to bring his family over to join him. The public health system and education available to New Zealand permanent residents were additional compelling factors for his move to Auckland early this year.

Since starting work in New Zealand, Joseph observed that while Singapore nursing homes employ more advanced technology, residents in the nursing homes in New Zealand enjoy a more spacious and home-like environment, with each person living in his or her own room that has a wardrobe and bathroom.

The Lien Foundation commissioned a study of Singapore's long term care (LTC) manpower landscape, benchmarking the Republic to four Asia Pacific economies- Australia, Hong Kong, Japan and South Korea.

# A LONG-TERM CARE WORKER

## — IN SINGAPORE —

About 3 in 4 LTC workers in Singapore are direct care workers

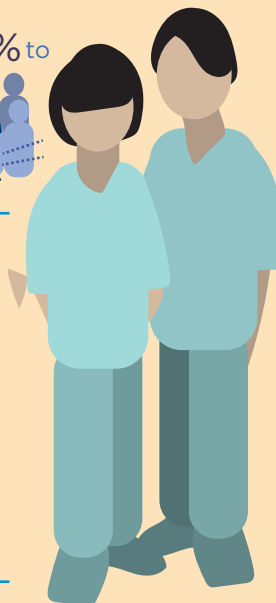
There are around **8300** direct care workers

This number needs to grow by **45%** to **12,000** in 2020 to meet growing demand



7 in 10 direct care workers are **FOREIGNERS**

About half of the foreign LTC workers work as nursing aides, healthcare assistants, or other support care roles



Career advancement opportunities are **limited**



Foreign LTC workers leave their employers after an average of

**2.8** years

Only allowed to stay and work in Singapore for up to

**22** years

This means a foreign LTC worker who comes to Singapore at 25 years old will have to leave when he or she turns 47. This is despite the training and work experience gained and having another 10 to 15 years to go before retirement.

*In comparison, foreign domestic workers can renew their work permits until 60 years of age.*



Foreign nursing aides earn about

**\$850**/month

Local nursing aides earn about

**\$1,350**/month

*This is less than half of what nursing aides earn in Hong Kong \$3,750, Australia \$3,290 and Japan \$3,000*

Spends an average of

**75**

hours of training a year, mostly on the job, but unable to receive any formal skills certification

*Training time is thrice more than LTC workers in Australia, Hong Kong and Japan and twice more than in South Korea*



## **FACTSHEET ON MANPOWER INITIATIVES FOR THE COMMUNITY CARE SECTOR**

*(Information provided by the Ministry of Health, July 2018)*

Singapore needs to expand our community care workforce in tandem to support capacity expansions. There are three key challenges in developing the community care workforce for the future: (1) Our local workforce growth is slowing down with an ageing population. Manpower growth for healthcare has to be sustainable and we have to enable our workforce to work better with higher productivity; (2) Providers requiring skilled staff in small numbers to provide care may face difficulties in attracting and retaining such staff amidst competition for skilled manpower; (3) We also need to equip our healthcare professionals with relevant skills to address the increasing and diverse needs of seniors.

To develop the community care workforce for the future, MOH has worked with the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) on initiatives to:

- (I) Improve sector reputation and localisation efforts
- (II) Tap on foreign manpower to complement the local workforce
- (III) Raise competitiveness of salaries
- (IV) Train staff to raise capabilities
- (V) Improve career progression and opportunities for advancement
- (VI) Enhance productivity improvements

| <b>Workforce Policies / Levers</b>                 | <b>Existing schemes and initiatives</b>   |
|--|---|
| Improve sector reputation and localisation efforts | <p>Since 2012, AIC has embarked on efforts to improve public perception of the community care sector.</p> <p><b>Facilitating local employment.</b> AIC has been working with community care providers and recruitment partners like Workforce Singapore (WSG) and e2i to facilitate employment of individuals and raise awareness of job opportunities in the community care sector. Our recruitment efforts have resulted in more than 1,000 locals successfully finding employment in the sector over the past year. Of which, 250 locals were hired into support care positions like healthcare assistants.</p> <p>The <b>Community Care Traineeship Programme (CCTP)</b> introduced in 2015 provides funding support to community care providers to send their newly hired local support staff for structured bite-sized training over a three-month period. Providers are also eligible for an On-the-Job training support of \$10,000 per local support staff recruited, to facilitate mentoring, supervision and development of new hires.</p> |

| Workforce Policies / Levers                               | Existing schemes and initiatives   |
|---|--|
|   | <p>The <b><u>Return-to-Nursing (RTN) scheme</u></b> was enhanced in 2016 to attract non-practicing local nurses to return to the community care sector, by strengthening the refresher training in the area of geriatric care. The scheme has also adopted a Place-and-Train model under which returning nurses are first placed with their employers before commencing the refresher course. As a result, they will be drawing salaries for the duration of the course, instead of a training allowance. Nurses returning to the community care sector are eligible for a bonus of \$3,000 and \$5,000 for Enrolled Nurses and Registered Nurses, respectively. Around 25 nurses had returned to nursing in the community care sector over the past two years.</p> <p>The <b><u>Senior Management Associate Scheme (SMAS)</u></b><sup>1</sup> was introduced in 2016 to facilitate the recruitment of mid-career professionals with supervisory or managerial experience into the community care sector as centre managers and operations directors. Uptake on the SMAS has been positive. More than 40 PMETs have successfully transited into the community care sector in 2017, working as centre managers and human resource managers.</p> <p>Beyond these, there is also the Healthcare <b><u>Professional Conversion Programmes (PCP)</u></b>, which help mid-career Singaporeans switch into the healthcare sector. Since 2003, over 1,000 mid-career professionals have participated in the healthcare PCPs, of whom around 800 were in nursing and 200 were in Allied Health Professions (AHPs). MOH and WSG recently introduced a new PCP for Registered Nurses at the degree level which is a 2-year Bachelor of Science (Nursing) degree programme at the Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies in NUS. This is an addition to the existing diploma level nursing conversion programme at Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP). In 2017, we enhanced the PCPs for Enrolled and Registered Nurses by providing employers with more funding to support the training of mid-career nurses. In October 2017, we also introduced a second intake for PCP for Registered Nurses intake at NYP. In 2016, we expanded our PCPs to include the new degree programmes at the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) for Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy and Diagnostic Radiography.</p> |
| Tap on foreign manpower to complement the local workforce | <p>While we have stepped up on efforts to recruit more locals, we will <b><u>require foreign manpower to complement the local workforce</u></b> so as to meet our overall manpower demand. Appropriate training programmes are in place to ensure they have the skills needed to provide safe, and competent care.</p> <p>All overseas-trained doctors and nurses need to meet stringent registration requirements by their respective professional Boards before they can practise in Singapore. As communications is an important factor in</p>  |

<sup>1</sup> Previously known as the Senior Management Trainee Development (SMTD) scheme, which started in 2013.

| Workforce Policies / Levers       | Existing schemes and initiatives  |
|-----------------------------------|---|
|                                   | <p>healthcare, these foreign healthcare professionals have to meet minimum standards in English proficiency before they are allowed to practice locally. For example, a foreign nurse will also have to pass recruitment interviews and the Singapore Nursing Board's licensure examination which is conducted in English.</p> <p>For foreign support care staff who are not registered professionals, there are training programmes under the AIC-Learning Institute (AIC-LI) to familiarise them with our local clinical practice, language and cultural context and help them adapt more quickly to the local working environment. Many providers, which are Approved Training Centres (ATCs) with the Institute of Technical Education (ITE), also train their foreign staff in-house to attain the ITE Skills Certificate (ISC) in Healthcare so that they can better support care for seniors.</p> <p>There are currently two ISC in Healthcare programmes, namely ISC in Healthcare (Home Care) and ISC in Healthcare (Dementia Care), which train candidates to assist patients with their activities of daily living (ADLs), basic nursing care and/or dementia care. Employers can apply to ITE to become ATCs to run the programme (classroom and on-the-job training) in-house for their employees. SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) provides a training grant to providers who become ATCs to conduct training for their staff. As at November 2017, there were 39 community care institutions, comprising nursing homes and community hospitals, which were ATCs.</p> |
| Raise competitiveness of salaries | <p>To support the attraction and retention of manpower in the community care sector, we have worked with the community care providers since 2012 to raise salaries of their staff through the <b>Intermediate and Long-Term Care Salary Adjustment Exercise (ILTC SAE)</b>, in tandem with salary increases in the public healthcare sector. We will continue to review the salaries of staff in the community care sector to ensure that they are recognised adequately for their expanding roles and contributions.</p>   |
| Train staff to raise capabilities | <p>The <b>AIC – Learning Institute (AIC-LI)</b> facilitates the provision of modular training for the community care sector in a broad array of areas such as clinical, therapy, and administration, and the training programmes are subsidised. More than 40,000 training places have been facilitated by the AIC-LI. Courses attended by locals are subsidised at 90% of the course fee while that of foreigners are subsidised at 45%.</p> <p>The <b>Community Care Training Grant (CCTG)</b> supports institutions in sending their staff for training such as conferences beyond the courses offered under the AIC-LI. More than 600 training places for staff in 50 community care institutions have been funded under the CCTG since April 2017. Courses attended by locals are subsidised at 90% of the course fee while that of foreigners are subsidised at 45%.</p>  |

| Workforce Policies / Levers                                  | Existing schemes and initiatives  |
|--|---|
|  | <p>To further deepen skills, the <b><u>Community Care Manpower Development Award (CCMDA)</u></b><sup>2</sup> introduced in 2017 provides sponsorships for local fresh entrants, mid-career switchers and current staff working in the community care sector to pursue advanced training in skills relevant to their work. It covers formal academic programmes and attachments to local or overseas healthcare and community care facilities. In the past year, about 60 individuals from 28 institutions have been awarded sponsorships to pursue advanced training. CCMDA also provides funding support for community care organisations to invite overseas experts who specialize in fields relevant to the sector, to impart their skills and share their knowledge with the community care audience.</p> <p>Community nurses play a central role in the shift of care beyond hospital to the community to better meet the care needs of the population. We are also investing in strengthening leadership capabilities as we grow the community nursing workforce. The <b><u>Community Nursing Scholarship</u></b>, offered by MOH in partnership with the Regional Health Systems (RHSes) and community care providers, aims to build a pipeline of nursing leaders to shape the future of community care. It is designed to attract new and existing nursing students, as well as in-service nurses who are keen to pursue a degree conversion programme, to work in the community after graduation.</p> |
| Improve career progression and opportunities for advancement | <p>As part of MOH's strategy to build a future-ready healthcare workforce, we are working with AIC to develop the <b><u>Skills Standards Framework (SSF)</u></b>, which articulates various skills domain for support care roles, and is targeted to be completed by end of this year.</p> <p>Separately, SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) is also developing the <b><u>Skills Framework for Healthcare and Social Service</u></b>, which articulates the competencies of each job role and help employers recognise skills gaps and develop workplace-based skills training to meet changing industry needs. It will facilitate national recognition of skills in the healthcare industry and the development of career progression pathways and remuneration frameworks. The Skills Framework for Healthcare and for Social Service are targeted to be developed by the end of this year, and we will work closely with employers and the healthcare union on their adoption.</p>   |

<sup>2</sup> Introduced in 2017 after the consolidation and expansion of the following four community care scholarships: Balaji Sadasivan Study Award, Intermediate and Long-Term Care-Upgrading Programme (ILTC-UP), Social and Health Manpower Development Programme-ILTC (SHMDP-ILTC) and Community Care General Practitioner Partnership Training Award (CC-GPPTA).

| <b>Workforce Policies / Levers</b> | <b>Existing schemes and initiatives</b>  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Enhance productivity improvements  | <p>MOH launched the <b><u>Healthcare Productivity Roadmap</u></b> in FY2012, supported by a budget of \$130 million for FY2012 to FY2017 under the <b><u>Healthcare Productivity Fund (HPF)</u></b>. The roadmap focused on raising productivity by (i) encouraging ground-up initiatives by healthcare operators in the public acute and community care sectors to streamline processes and adopt mechanisation to save manpower, and (ii) promoting the use of IT, education and training to raise the productivity of the healthcare workforce.</p> <p>To sustain efforts in healthcare productivity, another \$80 million has been added to the HPF for the next three years (FY2018 – FY2020) to scale up proven initiatives and encourage innovations. For the community care sector, AIC will be supported under the HPF to collaborate with operators to develop process blueprints for operational excellence, adopt assistive equipment and technologies for care and further expand demand aggregation and bulk procurement of products and services to achieve economies of scale.</p> |

. . . . .