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New MOM programme to help migrant workers manage health problems



The programme is expected to benefit some 300,000 migrant workers. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE



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SINGAPORE - Migrant workers with chronic diseases will get help to manage their medical conditions under a programme launched by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) on Saturday.

Under the programme, they will have access to a health library with materials in their native languages on chronic and infectious diseases. They will also undergo annual basic screening for cardiovascular diseases.

The programme, which the ministry has named Project Mocca (Management of Oral and Chronic Conditions and Ailments), is expected to benefit about 300,000 migrant workers.

Senior Minister of State for Manpower Koh Poh Koon launched it at a ceremony on Saturday to mark the official opening of a new medical centre for migrant workers in Gul Circle operated by Fullerton Health.

Dr Koh said it was not enough to provide care to migrant workers only when they are unwell.

Since March 2021, around one in eight newly arrived migrant workers has been found to have at least one chronic disease, such as diabetes, hypertension or high cholesterol.

“If these conditions are allowed to continue without good management, our migrant workers may over time develop severe complications, which will impact their livelihoods,” Dr Koh said. “And not just their health, but (it may) also bring a lot of burdens onto our employers as well. So it is something that needs to be managed for collective benefit for the whole ecosystem.”



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He said Project Mocca's three thrusts are to address knowledge gaps and inculcate healthier practices among migrant workers, to detect and manage risk factors, and to treat and control disease progression.

Information materials in the migrant workers' native languages on chronic and infectious diseases, oral and mental health diseases, and nutrition will be available to migrant workers on the MOM website and at medical centres. There will also be public education roadshows.

To allow early detection of chronic diseases, migrant workers enrolled under the Primary Care Plan (PCP) who are aged 40 and above, as well as those with pre-existing risk factors like family history, can undergo an annual basic screening for cardiovascular risk factors.

The PCP is required for migrant workers and is paid for by employers to cover medical consultations and treatments, medical examinations for work pass purposes, and telemedicine services.



Senior Minister of State for Manpower Koh Poh Koon (right) at Fullerton Health's Medical Centre for Migrant Workers on Nov 12, 2022. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

At the opening of the Gul Circle centre on Saturday, Dr Walter Lim, Singapore managing director for Fullerton Health, said more than 60,000 migrant workers have enrolled in Fullerton Health's PCP.

There have been about 5,000 medical consultations and 600 Covid-19 vaccinations at the centre since it began operations in April.

"Preventative health is important and a physical presence here gives us a chance for community outreach," he said.

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Dr Koh said Project Mocca is an important part of efforts to strengthen healthcare resilience for migrant workers.

"Early detection, preventative health education and good management of chronic diseases will complement other existing primary care support for our migrant workers' physical health and well-being," he said.

On Saturday, the Singapore Business Federation (SBF) also pledged \$600,000 from its MigrantWell Welfare Fund in its pilot year to serve the healthcare needs of migrant workers here.

The funding will support more than 1,500 migrant workers in their dental needs, said the SBF Foundation and the fund in a media statement.

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