

# HealthServe Launches First 24-hour Crisis Helpline for Migrant Workers in Singapore

The long-drawn-out pandemic has placed a major strain on the mental health of the migrant worker community in Singapore. To address migrant workers' growing set of multi-faceted challenges and improve their overall wellbeing, HealthServe has launched Singapore's first 24-hour crisis helpline for this underserved community in Singapore.

For the past year and a half, the approximate 300,000 migrant workers working in Singapore's Construction, Marine and Process (CMP) sectors who are living in dormitories have been largely confined to their rooms, only allowed to leave for work or to visit designated recreation centres. The prolonged movement restrictions, in contrast to loosened guidelines that applied to the rest of Singapore, have exacerbated migrant workers' feelings of segregation and despair. The social isolation has also caused negative mental health outcomes, with more migrant workers experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety over the future. This is often on top of workers' existing challenges related to health, finances and employment.



Monthly average of 200 calls for mental health support received in 2021

HealthServe's latest 24-hour crisis helpline seeks to provide a ready avenue for distressed migrant workers to reach out for assistance. The helpline is also open to employers and other members of the community who have concerns about workers' wellbeing.

The helpline is manned by HealthServe's team of Crisis Helpline Specialists and a growing pool of Crisis Helpline Volunteers (CHVs), some of whom can speak workers' native languages. Since May 2021, HealthServe has partnered the Samaritans of Singapore (SOS) to train over 100 staff and CHVs in skills such as empathetic listening, emotional support provision and suicide risk assessment and management over the phone. For cases requiring further intervention, HealthServe's native-speaking qualified counsellors will be activated.

#### 50% of calls received outside office hours

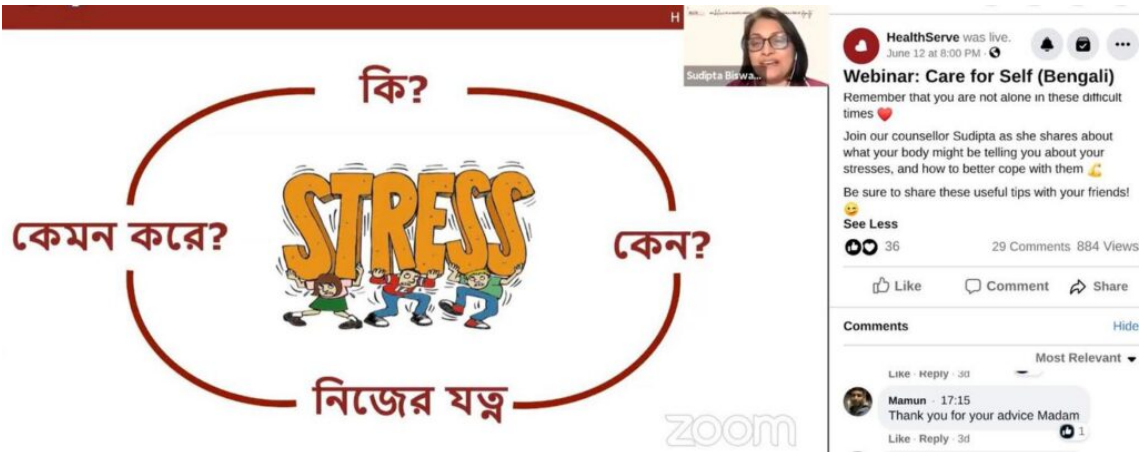
Since its pilot launch on 1 August 2021, the new 24-hour crisis helpline has seen 50% of calls received outside office hours, between 7pm to 10am. HealthServe's previous mental health hotline, launched during the peak of COVID-19 in May 2020, offered a call-back service for callers requiring mental health support or counselling.

Since January 2021, HealthServe has received a monthly average of about 200 calls for mental health support, with spikes on significant occasions such as news of tightened restriction measures in Singapore, disasters or crisis in migrant workers' home countries, or during festive seasons when workers tend to face increased stressors.

"Many migrant workers do not see their own mental wellbeing as a priority over other financial and employment-related challenges they may be facing. Often, as helplessness sets in, suicide risk increases, and that is a major cause for concern," shares Mr Michael Cheah, HealthServe's Executive Director. "With this new 24/7 crisis helpline, we hope to provide migrant workers a safe space where they can readily reach out for support, and to remind them that they matter too. We are grateful for the support of many partners on this journey to improve the care system for an often-neglected community in Singapore, and look forward to continued cross-sector collaborations in this direction."

Mr Gasper Tan, Chief Executive of SOS, adds, "As like-minded mental health advocates, SOS is glad to partner HealthServe in the collective training of crisis helpline volunteers to better support the large migrant worker population in Singapore. We hope that this new, much-needed service will be able to provide more timely and adequate support to improve migrant workers' mental wellbeing in these challenging times."

Cross-sector collaborations in the push for migrant workers' mental wellbeing.



“Care for Self” webinars conducted by HealthServe’s counsellors in workers’ native languages.

Working closely with like-minded partners across sectors, HealthServe has strived to meet the growing healthcare needs of distressed migrant workers since COVID-19 hit.

In addition to its clinics that continue to provide workers access to affordable healthcare services throughout the pandemic, HealthServe expedited the roll-out of a comprehensive mental health programme in the past year. New initiatives include online and offline awareness building and education programmes that equipped workers with practical tips to care for themselves and others.



Peer Support Leader trainings conducted by HealthServe, as part of Project DAWN.

As part of the inter-agency Project DAWN taskforce spearheaded by the Ministry of Manpower to boost mental health awareness and support for migrant workers, HealthServe has also been taking lead in the training of select groups of workers staying in dormitories to step up as Peer Support Leaders (PSL). Equipped with basic Psychological First Aid knowledge and skills, these PSLs are then empowered to be the first line of support for members of their own community who may be in distress or need of assistance.

Should migrant workers, employers or concerned members of the community wish to seek assistance for migrant workers, call HealthServe's 24-hour crisis helpline for support: +65 3129 5000

To find out more on how to step up as a Crisis Helpline Volunteer with HealthServe, visit [www.healthserve.org.sg/volunteer](http://www.healthserve.org.sg/volunteer)