

HealthServe Unveils Dental Clinic for Migrant Workers to Address Growing Need

Refurbished space will enable the healthcare charity to double its capacity to benefit 2,500 migrant workers with dental problems every year



Singapore, 14 October 2023 – To address the growing demand for dental care among the low-wage migrant worker population in Singapore, healthcare NGO HealthServe has unveiled a new dental clinic in the heart of Geylang.

Founded in 2006, the charity expanded its GP clinic in 2015 to offer Singapore's first subsidised dental service for migrant workers in the Construction, Marine shipyard and Process (CMP) sectors. In the last three years, low-wage migrant workers seeking subsidised dental treatment at HealthServe[1] have faced a waiting period of four to six months.

Today, dental care remains an unmet need for low-wage migrant workers in Singapore. Dental services are currently not covered in the government's Primary Care Plan (PCP)[2] for migrant workers in the CMP sectors.

HealthServe's new 625-sq ft dental clinic aims to plug this gap by providing affordable quality dental care for migrant workers in need. Equipped with two dental treatment rooms and a new

x-ray service, the refurbished space would enable the charity to tend to at least 2,500 migrant patients with painful dental conditions every year –a two-fold increase from its previous

capacity. HealthServe's clinic operations are presently supported by a team of 70 dentists and dental assistants, made up of volunteers and external partners.

The opening ceremony on Sunday afternoon was graced by Dr Koh Poh Koon, Senior Minister of State for Manpower, and Sustainability and the Environment. The event was attended by over 50 members of HealthServe's dental community, including healthcare practitioners, partners and volunteers.



“From a dental health study HealthServe conducted with NUS, we found that at least 1.5% of migrant workers required early referrals for dental pain but were not seeking treatment[3]. Concerns over high costs often lead migrant workers to suffer in silence,” says Dr Benjamin Kuan, CEO of HealthServe. “Through the expansion of our dental care capacity, HealthServe

aims to bridge this growing gap by providing affordable dental services to more needy migrant workers.

Dr Kuan adds, “Early preventive care through education is also crucial as poor oral health has also been shown to be associated with increased risks of chronic conditions such as diabetes and heart disease.”

Manikrishnan, a construction worker from India, shared, “I used to *tahan* (endure) constant pain for a long time, and could not *makan* (eat) or sleep properly. Dental clinic outside was too expensive. My friend brought me to HealthServe, the teeth doctor helped me a lot. Now, I can enjoy meals, smile and work without pain or financial stress.”



Cross-sector collaborations to care for migrant workers' oral health

HealthServe's dental clinic expansion is co-funded by MigrantWell Singapore and Migrant Worker's Centre; and supported by several long-standing partners across sectors. They include the Ministry of Manpower, the Paperspace Collective (made up of Graphite Studio, Kelvin Frank Reid, Valternative), QST Technologies, Singapore Concrete Institute and Tong Eng Group.

HealthServe's latest clinic expansion is part of the healthcare charity's concerted effort to strengthen its dental care capacity and provide timelier assistance for the underserved migrant population in Singapore. In addition to scaling up its own clinic operations and volunteer recruitment, HealthServe has also expanded its panel of external dental partners, from private dental groups such as Royce Dental Group to dental schools such as the NUS Faculty of Dentistry (FOD).

Last May, HealthServe collaborated with the NUS FOD and the NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health to hold Singapore's first Migrant Workers' Dental Screening and Health Education Fair[4]. Over 400 migrant workers, many of whom presented dental problems, had their teeth and gums checked by dentists at no cost.

[1] At HealthServe's dental clinic, migrant workers need only to pay \$15 or \$30 for consultation, treatment and medication. A regular dental check-up in Singapore (est. \$75 – \$145) can cost up to nine times of a low-wage migrant worker's daily pay, which is about \$14-\$18.

[2] Implemented in 2022, the PCP aims to provide eligible Work Permit Holders with accessible and affordable healthcare and is part of a larger Primary Healthcare System established by MOM. More details here: <https://www.mom.gov.sg/primary-care-plan>

[3] A dental health survey HealthServe conducted in collaboration with NUS School of Dentistry and NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health in May 2022 reported that many migrant workers had poorer dental hygiene and oral health practices as compared to the local population.

[4]<https://www.healthserve.org.sg/singapores-first-large-scale-dental-screening-and-health-education-fair-for-migrant-workers-attracted-400-workers/>