

Support for Parents and Families

New universal Mental Health Screening for pregnant women

In Singapore, about one in five pregnant women experienced depressive symptoms during pregnancy or after delivery. In addition, about one in 10 women experience postnatal depression within the first three months postpartum.

The local study Growing Up in Singapore Towards Healthy Outcomes (GUSTO) found that maternal mental well-being during pregnancy could affect the brain development of the foetus, giving rise to vulnerability, such as mood or anxiety disorders later in life. The study also found that positive maternal mental health and well-being play an important role in the child's development after birth.

To address this, we need to intervene early, to better support the mental well-being of women during and after their pregnancy and avoid or minimise any detrimental effects on their children.

The Psychological Resilience in Antenatal Management (PRAM) programme will address the overall well-being of mothers and mothers-to-be and has downstream implications on their child's learning and behaviours, such as their language and cognitive development and executive functioning.

Guidelines launched for mental health support for mothers

The Perinatal Mental Health Guidelines will provide comprehensive and timely advice for women from the preconception to postnatal stages and serve to form a stronger foundation for good perinatal mental health in Singapore.

The Guidelines emphasise the importance of screening for timely detection and treatment of mental health conditions in mothers. It also highlights the benefits of early intervention and support for women who are at risk of developing mental well-being issues during pregnancy.

The Guidelines also provide specific focus on supporting vulnerable groups who might need more help, such as women with special needs, adolescent mothers, and those who have experienced severe adverse obstetric events.

A new advisory on screen use for children 12 and below

The availability of screen devices and their uses have rapidly expanded over recent years. While children can benefit from screen use, there are also potential downsides, particularly in children below 36 months, as it is a sensitive period of brain development.

Excessive screen use is also associated with poorer language skills and shorter attention spans in infants and toddlers. It has also been observed that screen use is associated with insufficient good quality sleep, sedentary behaviours, increased

obesity, and poorer mental health and well-being. These potential negative consequences are linked to the degree that screen use displaces other activities, such as sleeping, playing and interacting with friends and being physically active.

MOH has therefore launched an advisory on screen use for children aged 0 to 12 years to provide parents with more resources and practical help to support their children on healthy screen and device use.

The advisory on screen use provides guidance by specific age groups to help guide parents to calibrate their child's screen and device use. The advisory also provides important guidance that parents can adopt so that together, the family can cultivate healthy screen use practices together.

Family Nexus – integrated hub to support families

Family Nexus brings together selected health and social services under one roof, allowing families to easily access varied services at a one-stop community node near them. This could be at or near a polyclinic, a General Practitioner clinic, or social service agency office. Families can also navigate and sign up for other relevant programmes organised by community partners in the region, including breastfeeding and lactation support services, Body Mass Index and Growth Assessment checks for young children, marriage preparation courses, activities that promote parents' emotional and mental well-being, parenting or grandparent programmes, and caregivers' training.

Enhanced support for lower-income families

In the Northeast Region, SingHealth will be working alongside KidSTART and ComLink team to lead cross-domain and multi-agency efforts to support children through Project HOME (Holistic Management & Enablement). This collaboration brings together healthcare agencies like Sengkang General Hospital (SKH), KKH and Punggol Polyclinic to partner preschools under My First Campus and social agencies including Social Service Offices and Family Service Centres, to jointly support case management of children under 6 years old.

The National University Hospital will be rolling out a similar pilot in the West through HEADS-UPP (HEALTH and Development SUPPORT in Preschool Partnerships) programme, working with Care Corner and PCF Sparkletots preschools in the region.

Both pilot programmes will equip preschool educators and social workers with skills to support the health and development screening of preschool children; identify at-risk children and refer them for intervention; and provide multi-disciplinary case management to children and their families, such as support for the families from a team of community nurses. There will also be home visits and additional support to equip and empower parents for families that are assessed as having complex needs. To improve cross-domain integration, the pilots will also enhance access and referral to information and programmes such as fast-tracking of medical appointments for these children, if needed.