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WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY EFFORTS TO SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF YOUTHS IN...

Press Releases

WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY EFFORTS TO SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF YOUTHS IN SINGAPORE

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The Institute of Mental Health (IMH) has released the findings of the latest National Youth Mental Health Study (NYMHS), which provides deeper insights into the state of youth mental health and well-being in Singapore. The study was spearheaded by the IMH, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, CHAT (Centre of Excellence for Youth Mental Health) and NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health.

2. Findings from the study affirm the whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to tackling youth mental health issues in the National Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy that was launched by the Government in October 2023. Many of the measures under the Strategy are already in place, while others will be progressively rolled out across the next few years.

Upstream Support to Improve Youth Mental Health

3. The NYMHS found that among the participants of the study, about one in three young people aged between 15 and 35 years in Singapore reported experiencing severe or extremely severe symptoms of depression, anxiety and/or stress. This is similar to other research studies conducted on youth mental health and well-being based on self-reporting.

4. The study also identified protective factors, such as resilience, social support, and self-esteem, which were associated with lower likelihood of severe or extremely severe symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress. It is therefore important that we continue with our upstream efforts to mitigate the risk of mental health issues among youths, strengthen support, and build resilience at a young age.

5. In schools, Mental Health Education lessons in the Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) curriculum provide students with knowledge and skills to regulate their emotions, differentiate normal stress from distress or mental illnesses, and to seek help when needed.

6. Such learning is reinforced through student development experiences beyond the classroom such as co-curricular activities, learning journeys, and outdoor adventure learning camps, which also contribute to students' well-being. As part of the Cyber Wellness Education lessons in the CCE curriculum, students are taught to be safe, respectful and responsible users of the cyberspace and to be positive peer influence. These efforts extend to the Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs) through various mental and digital well-being programmes that continue to equip youths to be resilient in navigating life challenges in the digital age.

7. The NYMHS also found that informal support networks such as family and friends remain the predominant form of support accessed by youth. In line with this, schools and IHLs have in place an ecosystem of support comprising peer supporters, educators, and school counsellors. Such communities encourage help-seeking as well as facilitate early identification of, and timely intervention for those who require more support.

8. In the wider community, informal social support networks like Well-Being Circles have been set up to strengthen peer support networks, equip the community with basic skills to care for themselves and those around them, and raise awareness of the importance of mental health and well-being. Well-Being Circles have been set up at various locales, including youth-centric ones such as Project Re:ground @ Red Box and Punggol West Well-Being Circle. Since 2022, Well-Being Circles have trained over 600 individuals in peer support skills and reached more than 3,000 people through their programmes.

9. The NYMHS also examined various factors linked to mental health symptoms among youths, including excessive social media use, body shape concerns, and cyberbullying. To empower and equip parents with skills to build strong parent-child relationships, strengthen their children's mental well-being and emotional resilience, and support their children's digital journeys while keeping them safe online, a toolbox of bite-sized strategies called Parenting for Wellness will be rolled out in phases from September 2024. The first phase of resources was launched on 18 September 2024. It will cover various topics such as managing screen use, addressing cyberbullying, understanding mental health and well-being, and supporting the child to cope with difficult emotions e.g. stress and anxiety.

10. A Positive Use Guide on Technology and Social Media will also be introduced as an authoritative, research-based source to guide healthy and positive uses of technology and social media, and provide recommendations to mitigate its potential negative impact. This guide will be ready in the first half of 2025.

Early Access to Mental Health Support in the Community

11. Enhancing community support is a key focus area of the Strategy. This enables individuals with mental health needs to seek early support without stigma and receive help for their recovery. Youths may approach community mental health services like Youth Community Outreach Teams (CREST-Youth) and Youth Integrated Teams (YITs) provided by social service agencies. CREST-Youth conduct outreach to raise awareness of mental health issues and promote early identification, while YITs provide mental health assessment and psychosocial interventions. The community mental health services provided by CREST-Youth and YITs are catered for youths aged 12 to 25 years old, and are fully funded by the government without any out-of-pocket cost. As of March 2024, we have eight CREST-Youth teams that have reached out to over 98,000 youths and parents, and four YITs that have supported over 4,500 youths and parents. These teams will be expanded across Singapore by 2030.

12. Alternatively, youths can approach CHAT, a national youth mental health outreach and assessment service for young people aged 16 to 30 years old to receive mental health checks, intervention and outreach services. As of end-March 2024, CHAT has supported over 7,600 youths in the community at risk of mental health conditions, and provided them with mental health assessments. CHAT also started an online messaging platform (webCHAT) since 2017 for youths to receive counselling in real time for their mental health-related concerns. It has conducted about 3,100 webCHAT sessions as of end March 2024.

A Whole-of-Society Approach to Youth Mental Health and Well-being

13. Ultimately a whole-of-Singapore effort is required to tackle the multi-faceted nature of youth mental health, by de-stigmatising mental health conditions, building resilience and encouraging early help-seeking among youths.¹ For example, NUS' Youth Epidemiology and Resilience (YEAR) study, which was reported in April 2023, found that about one in three youths aged 10 to 18 years old in Singapore reported internalising mental health symptoms such as depression, anxiety and loneliness. However, only 12% of respondents eventually met the diagnostic criteria for mental health disorder. In addition, the National Population Health Survey (NPHS) 2023 found that about one quarter of youths aged 18 to 29 years old reported poor mental health.

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