

THE STRAITS TIMES

More support for migrant workers' mental health, community visits expanded: Tan See Leng



Ng Wei Kai

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SINGAPORE - Access to mental health support for migrant workers is being expanded on multiple fronts, Minister for Manpower Tan See Leng told Parliament on Tuesday (Nov 2).

For instance, all new Forward Assurance and Support Team (Fast) members undergo basic mental health and psychological first aid training, with 500 officers having been trained to date.

Fast teams are Ministry of Manpower (MOM) officers deployed to dormitories to help manage Covid-19 in those quarters.

MOM is also working with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to make counselling and para-counselling more accessible, while webinars have been conducted for dorm operators and employers on mental health issues to build their awareness, he added.

A pathway to escalate the care given to severe cases has also been developed with the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) to ensure that such workers get timely care, he added.

Dr Tan was responding to questions from Mr Edward Chia (Holland-Bukit Timah GRC) on the mental well-being of migrant workers living in dorms here, including the number who have sought mental health care or had to stop work due to severe mental health concerns.

Between January and September 2021, 98 work permit holders were admitted to IMH, said Dr Tan.



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This was lower than the number admitted in the same period last year, but higher than the number in 2019, he noted.

Besides NGOs and dorm operators, MOM is also working with employers and the workers themselves through the Project Dawn task force, which was set up last November to boost mental health support for migrant workers.

This includes the training of peer support leaders, with 600 workers to be trained by end-2022.

Dr Tan also addressed the issue of dormitory residents not being able to leave their dorms due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Any easing of these restrictions must be done in a careful and calibrated manner so as to avoid adding additional stress to Singapore's healthcare system.



Between January and September 2021, 98 work permit holders were admitted to IMH. PHOTO: ST FILE

Since August last year, workers have been allowed to visit recreation centres, and the frequency of visits to these centres have been recently increased from once to thrice a week, he said.

MOM has also removed the requirement for vaccinated workers to get tested before such visits.

Last weekend, MOM also increased the cap on the number of vaccinated workers allowed to visit community areas from 500 to 3,000, and included the Geylang Serai and Joo Chiat areas, he said.

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Visit durations were also extended to eight hours, up from six hours a week. The expansion of the pilot started on Oct 30.

Leader of the Opposition Pritam Singh asked how MOM had determined the cap on numbers for community visits, as understanding the reasoning behind the current figure of 3,000 would give some idea of when further opening can happen.

Dr Tan said each step towards easing movement restrictions for workers has required much logistical arrangement and efforts to ensure medical safety, including liaising with places of worship the workers wanted to visit and arranging testing and transportation for them.

He added: "Hopefully in the ensuing weeks and months ahead as we move to this new normal, the plan is not to restrict but to open up even more, but at this particular point in time because we just started the 3,000 just three days ago, we will maintain and watch it for a while."

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- National Care Hotline:
1800-202-6868 (8am - 12am)

Mental well-being

- Institute of Mental Health's Mental Health Helpline:
6389-2222 (24 hours)
- Samaritans of Singapore:
1800-221-4444 (24 hours) /1-767 (24 hours)
- Singapore Association for Mental Health:
1800-283-7019
- Silver Ribbon Singapore:
6386-1928
- Tinkle Friend:
1800-274-4788 and www.tinklefriend.sg
- Community Health Assessment Team:
6493-6500/1 and www.chat.mentalhealth.sg

Counselling

- TOUCHline (Counselling):
1800-377-2252
- TOUCH Care Line (for seniors, caregivers):
6804-6555
- Care Corner Counselling Centre:
1800-353-5800

Online resources

- mindline.sg
- [My Mental Health](#)
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