

Home palliative care capacity to rise 50% by end-2025: Ong Ye Kung

New MOH scheme will help make it easier to rent home equipment like hospital beds

Judith Tan
Correspondent

With a rapidly ageing population in Singapore, more people are being given the opportunity to die in the comfort of their homes.

To help them do so, home palliative care capacity will be increased to 3,600 by end-2025, up by 50 per cent from the current 2,400.

"By then, we would have almost doubled the home palliative care capacity from the point of announcing the new measures," Health Minister Ong Ye Kung said at the official opening of Tan Tock Seng Hospital Integrated Care Hub on March 19.

When the National Strategy for Palliative Care was launched in July 2023, home palliative capacity was around 2,000 patients. This number is expected to increase to 2,800 by the end of 2024.

Inpatient and day hospice capacities are also expected to rise by

around 15 per cent and 12 per cent, respectively, by 2025. This translates to a total capacity of about 300 inpatient beds and 140 day hospice places.

"I know capacity expansion is not a simple matter. It is not just about having more funding, but also adequate skilled manpower, equipment and effective management oversight," Mr Ong said.

"Nevertheless, the needs are rising, the work is urgent, and I hope our providers, especially those delivering home palliative care, can move as fast as you can to fulfil the wishes of as many patients as possible."

Currently, patients who wish to die at home face difficulties not only in getting their hands on medical equipment, but also the high cost of setting them up at home.

To help smoothen the transition, the Ministry of Health (MOH) is rolling out its new Equipment Rental Scheme, where public hos-



3,600

Home palliative care capacity by end-2025, up by 50 per cent from the current 2,400.

15%

Expected increase in number of inpatient beds by 2025.

12%

Rise in number of day hospice places by then.

pitals will help make it easier to rent home equipment, instead of having the families deal with rental companies themselves.

MOH has set aside \$23 million for three years – from 2024 to 2027 – to implement this scheme, and more than 12,000 patients are expected to benefit.

Under the scheme, which will be launched in October, a compassionate discharged patient receiving maximum subsidies can pay about \$100 to rent two pieces of equipment for a week.

These can include a hospital bed and an oxygen concentrator, which would have cost more than \$2,000 if families were to buy them.

Mr Ong said his ministry will be monitoring the scheme and study how best to continue providing such support in the long run.

As Singapore prepares to become a "super aged" society, MOH

has also enhanced financing for inpatient palliative care, home palliative care and day hospice care significantly.

Since February 2024, the lifetime MediSave withdrawal limit has been removed for all home palliative and day hospice patients who use their own MediSave.

The MediShield Life daily claim limits for inpatient palliative care have also been raised from \$250 to \$460 for general care, and from \$350 to \$500 for specialised care.

Under the 2023 National Strategy for Palliative Care, MOH also announced that the palliative care subsidy framework would be enhanced from the fourth quarter of 2024, where all Singapore citizens would receive subsidies of at least 50 per cent regardless of their monthly per capita household income.

Health Minister Ong Ye Kung and Central Singapore District Mayor Denise Phua visiting Mr Tay Jiak Mong, 71, at Dover Park Hospice on March 19, as part of the official opening ceremony of Tan Tock Seng Hospital Integrated Care Hub. Mr Tay is accompanied by border collie Jacque during a pet-assisted activity.

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WP chief Pritam Singh charged with lying to Parliament, pleads not guilty



Leader of the Opposition and Workers' Party chief Pritam Singh (left) at the State Courts on March 19. Singh and WP vice-chairman Faisal Manap (above) had been called as witnesses in 2021 by a committee looking into Ms Raeesah Khan's lies in Parliament about a sexual assault victim. The prosecution has decided not to charge Mr Faisal for his refusal to answer the committee's questions.
ST PHOTO: KELVIN CHNG

Alleged untruths are in relation to lying controversy involving ex-MP Raeesah Khan

Tham Yuen-C
Senior Political Correspondent and Nadine Chua

Leader of the Opposition and Workers' Party (WP) chief Pritam Singh was charged on March 19 with two counts of lying to a parliamentary committee, two years after the police opened investigations into his conduct before the Committee of Privileges.

The charges relate to his testimony before the committee, which had been convened in November 2021 to look into a lying controversy involving his party's former MP Raeesah Khan.

The committee called Singh as a witness, and said later he had not been truthful during the hearings while under oath. It recommended referring him and WP vice-chairman Faisal Manap to the public prosecutor for further investigations with a view to consider criminal proceedings, which Parliament later endorsed.

Standing in the dock on March 19, Singh, who was unrepresented, pleaded not guilty to the two charges under Section 31(q) of the Parliament (Privileges, Immuni-

ties and Powers) Act, and claimed trial.

The 47-year-old opposition leader requested a four-week adjournment to engage a lawyer. A pre-trial conference has been scheduled for April 17.

Lying in response to questions posed by a parliamentary committee is considered a criminal offence under the Act, and carries a maximum fine of \$7,000 and a jail term of up to three years, or both.

In response to media queries, an Attorney-General's Chambers (AGC) spokesman said it is for the court to decide what the appropriate punishment should be if Singh is found guilty.

The spokesman added that the AGC will be asking the court to impose a fine for each of the charges if Singh is convicted. This is based on the "evidence presently available and considering the totality of the circumstances".

Political and legal experts told The Straits Times that the WP chief is unlikely to lose his parliamentary seat, even if he is convicted and the total fine for both offences exceeds \$10,000 – the threshold upon which an MP faces disqualification from the House.

This is as the threshold is for a single offence, rather than a group, said law professor Eugene Tan.

In a joint statement, the AGC and police also said the prosecution has decided not to charge Mr Faisal for his refusal to answer relevant questions that had been put to him by the committee. The WP MP was issued an advisory by the police.

Singh arrived at the State Courts at 10.45am, clad in a black suit. When asked for comment after being charged, he said he would be releasing a statement later. He subsequently said he would continue with all his parliamentary duties and town council responsibilities until the legal process "comes to a complete close".

The committee's recommendation for Singh to be referred to the public prosecutor came after it investigated Ms Khan for lying in Parliament.

During a debate on empowering women on Aug 3, 2021, Ms Khan, then an MP for Sengkang GRC, had claimed to have accompanied a sexual assault victim to a police station, where the victim was treated insensitively. She repeated the claim again in the House on Oct 4, 2021.

This was later found to be untrue, and Ms Khan eventually told Parliament on Nov 1, 2021, that she had been sexually assaulted her-

self and had heard about the victim's experience at a support group session.

She resigned from the WP and her parliamentary seat on Nov 30, 2021.

In the charge sheets, Singh was said to have given a false answer to the committee's questions on Dec 10 and 15, 2021.

On one occasion, he had said that after an Aug 8 meeting between him, Ms Khan and WP leaders Sylvia Lim and Faisal, he wanted Ms Khan to clarify that she had lied in Parliament on Aug 3.

On two other occasions, he had said that during a meeting with Ms Khan on Oct 3, he had asked her to come clean about her lie if the issue was brought up in the House on Oct 4.

The eight-member committee comprised seven People's Action Party MPs and one WP MP. They were then Speaker of Parliament Tan Chuan-Jin, Minister for Sustainability and the Environment Grace Fu, Minister for National Development Desmond Lee, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Edwin Tong, Senior Minister of State for Manpower and Defence Zaqy Mohamad, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Law Rahayu Mahzam, Hougang MP and WP organising secretary Dennis Tan, and Chua Chu Kang GRC MP Don Wee.

After a total of 31 hours of hearings held over several weeks, the committee found Ms Khan guilty of abuse of privilege and recommended that she be fined a total of \$35,000.

It also recommended that Singh and Mr Faisal be referred to the public prosecutor for further investigations – Singh for not being truthful in his testimony under oath, and Mr Faisal for his "flagrant and inexcusable" refusal to answer relevant questions.

Ms Lim had also been called as a witness by the committee, but was not referred for further investigations.

At the crux of the matter was the three months that elapsed before Ms Khan confessed in Parliament on Nov 1, 2021, to lying.

The committee concluded that Singh had played "the key and leading role" in advising her not to come clean after she first lied, and said he had lied when he asserted during the hearings that he had asked her to set the record straight in the House.

Singh has consistently denied the allegations. Though he acknowledged that he had given Ms Khan too much time to clarify the lie, he said he had done so as he was sympathetic to the fact that she had been a victim of sexual assault.

In its 1,180-page report presented

to Parliament on Feb 10, 2022, the committee said it was beyond its purview to recommend any penalty be imposed on Singh and Mr Faisal.

The committee added that while the default position is that Parliament should deal with matters that arise in a parliamentary context, it appeared best in this case that the matter "be dealt with through a trial process, rather than by Parliament alone", given the seriousness of the two WP leaders' actions.

In February 2022, after debating the committee's report, Parliament voted in favour of the committee's recommendation. The Attorney-General then referred both men to the police for investigation.

Singh had posted online in February 2022 about the prospect of losing his seat as an MP or being disqualified from standing for election, since this could happen if a person was jailed for at least one year or fined at least \$2,000. The disqualification lasts for five years.

The Parliament (Privileges, Immunities and Powers) Act was amended in May 2022 such that an MP will be disqualified if convicted and fined at least \$10,000 for an offence.

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Vivian, Palestinian leaders exchange views on Gaza war

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RAMALLAH, West Bank – Meetings between a Singapore delegation led by Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan and officials from the Palestinian Authority on March 18 yielded a candid exchange of views on the war in Gaza, with concerns raised that the fighting could spill over and become a regional conflict, said the minister.

This would have profound implications for the Middle East and as far afield as South-east Asia, Dr Balakrishnan told the media at Singapore's representative office in Ramallah, noting that the discussions also revolved around the deterioration of the humanitarian, political and security situation in that region.

"They were very candid. What happened on Oct 7 was a calamity... to both the Israelis and to the Palestinians, and there is no running away from the fact that this has been a very major setback and has had unbearable humanitarian consequences," he said.

Noting Singapore's "good and strong" relationship with the Palestinian Authority, which runs parts of the occupied West Bank, Dr Balakrishnan said he appreciated the officials' openness, constructiveness and trust, even though they know that Singapore's position cannot be identical to theirs.

"It doesn't mean we have to agree on everything, but there is respect, there is a commitment to mutual support," he added.

Dr Balakrishnan had called on Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh and Prime Minister-designate Mohammad Mustafa in Ramallah as part of a 10-day working visit to the Middle East.

Dr Mustafa, a former World Bank official and chairman of the Palestine Investment Fund, will be taking over from Dr Shtayyeh who, along with his government, resigned in February in the wake of the war in Gaza and escalating violence in the West Bank, where Israel has stepped up military raids amid Palestinian street attacks.

Dr Balakrishnan also met his



Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan being shown the city of Ramallah by Palestinian Authority Prime Minister-designate Mohammad Mustafa (right) and Palestine Investment Fund chief officer for communications and public relations Awad Duaibes at the fund's office on March 18. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

Palestinian counterpart Riad Al-Malki and General Intelligence Services head Majed Faraj in Ramallah.

During these meetings, Dr Balakrishnan expressed Singapore's deep concern about the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza, the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) said in a statement on March 19.

The ministry reiterated Singapore's call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, which will allow for the effective delivery of aid to affected civilians in Gaza.

MFA said the minister updated

the Palestinian leaders on Singapore's assistance to the Hamas-controlled enclave, including the third tranche of aid being delivered via airdrops through Jordan.

Dr Balakrishnan said the leaders were grateful for the outpouring of generosity and compassion from all Singaporeans.

"They know that we support the welfare and future of the Palestinian people, and our discussions proceed along those lines... The fact that we have been raising funds, providing support, I think that clearly registered in their minds and in their hearts," he added.

Asked how young Singaporeans should express their concern about the crisis in Gaza, Dr Balakrishnan said any compassion or anger needs to be converted into "positive directions".

"I am glad Singaporeans care," he said. "If young people didn't care, that would be terrible for our future."

He was also asked how he would take the insights gleaned from his visit to Ramallah into his upcoming

Home palliative care • Capacity to be increased

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Patients who wish to die at home will get help with the required medical equipment. The Ministry of Health is rolling out its new Equipment Rental Scheme, where public hospitals will help make it easier to rent home equipment.

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