

## Parliament

# Law proposed for sharing patients' health info among care providers

Aim is to reduce the repeating of medical tests or giving of wrong prescriptions

Yap Wei Qiang  
Correspondent

A new Bill which paves the way to mandate the sharing of patients' health information among healthcare providers was introduced in Parliament on Nov 5 after two years of delay.

Under the Health Information Bill (HIB), sharing of these details will mostly be done through a central repository called the National Electronic Health Record (NEHR) system.

The aim is to reduce the repeating of medical tests or giving of wrong prescriptions, for the benefit of all patients here, and to ensure health information is kept updated, accurate and accessible by healthcare providers.

Since 2011, NEHR has stored the health data of patients of public hospitals and polyclinics, including diagnoses, medication, allergies and laboratory reports.

If passed, the Bill will require all healthcare service providers licensed under the Healthcare Services Act – including general practitioner (GP) clinics and all nine private hospitals – to also contribute data to the NEHR.

Care providers approved by the Ministry of Health (MOH), such as community pharmacies, will also need to contribute data to the NEHR.

Only authorised healthcare professionals who are directly providing care to the patient, or performing specific medical, dental, psychiatric or psychological examinations of the patient, can access the patient's NEHR records.

Under the Bill, healthcare providers must also have measures to protect patients' health information through timely updates of their systems and software, and they must equip staff to safeguard cyber security.

Hospitals and clinics will need to report cyber-security incidents and data breaches.

If a breach involves the data of at least 500 individuals, and could cause significant harm to an affected individual, the healthcare provider will be required to notify the affected individuals.

Protections are already in place under the Healthcare Services, Personal Data Protection and Cybersecurity Acts governing the use and protection of health information.

In addition, MOH has worked with the Personal Data Protection Commission and the Cyber Security Agency of Singapore to identify areas where safeguards would need to be strengthened, and also consulted healthcare professionals, patients and information technology vendors on data privacy and sharing issues.

Seven out of the nine private hospitals in Singapore told The Straits Times in September that they are on track to contributing their patients' health records to the NEHR by the end of 2025.

Citing challenges in organising the databases in their current electronic medical record systems to align with the formats of the NEHR, Thomson Medical and Mount Alvernia Hospital will face delays in contributing their records.

The HIB specifies what kind of sharing can take place through the NEHR. For instance, data sharing will be limited to authorised parties involved in the direct care of a patient.

Proper storage, reproduction and transmission of data will also be mandatory.

Health information in the HIB refers to an individual's administra-

tive and clinical data.

Administrative data includes the patient's personal information such as name, address, contact details and other demographic data. Such data is considered to be health information when used in the provision of healthcare.

It could be used to assess an individual's eligibility for financial schemes and allow community service providers to reach out to targeted population segments to provide services, such as befriending services that support seniors.

On the other hand, clinical data includes information related to the physical and mental health of the individual.

Genetic data is considered such information, as well as diagnoses, prescriptions, investigation reports, procedures and discharge summaries.

HIB prohibits direct access of the NEHR for the purposes of determining a person's suitability or eligibility for employment, including promotion or removal from employment.

Health information also cannot be accessed for matters related to insurance, such as processing a claim.

There will be additional safeguards when users attempt to access information considered to be more sensitive, such as that which is related to pregnancy termination or sexually transmitted diseases.

Patients can choose to restrict the sharing of data among the healthcare providers that they seek care from.

Health Minister Ong Ye Kung previously said that while this may not be an ideal arrangement and may undermine quality of care for the patient, making such a choice available addresses fears and instils confidence.

For those who choose to restrict access, healthcare professionals will be blocked from accessing their NEHR records.

However, the background contribution of selected health information to NEHR will continue, to ensure there will be no gaps in the records if the individual chooses to remove the access restriction in future.

Since 2011, more than 2,300 patients have opted out of NEHR, though more than 180 have opted back in after being counselled on its benefits.

HIB provides for instances when a healthcare professional can choose to override the access restriction, such as to provide life-saving treatment during a medical emergency.

MOH will audit such cases, and those who inappropriately override the restrictions may face legal penalties under the HIB, as well as disciplinary action from their respective professional bodies, such as the Singapore Medical Council.

Individuals would be able to view in their HealthHub account which healthcare institutions have accessed their health records, and to set notifications when records are accessed.

HIB also provides for the sharing of health information outside NEHR, such as a hospital's own electronic medical records, for specific purposes, like ensuring continuity of care, assessing eligibility of financing schemes, and for outreach under national healthcare initiatives.

Announced in 2022, the HIB was initially scheduled to be introduced in Parliament in the second half of 2023.

The Bill is expected to be debated at the next Parliament sitting.

yapwq@sph.com.sg

## Stay Strong initiative by FairPrice Foundation and TTSH to bridge seniors' nutrition gap

Chin Soo Fang  
Senior Correspondent

A nutrition education programme for seniors will be jointly developed by FairPrice Foundation and Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) by the end of 2026, as part of ongoing efforts to promote healthy ageing through better diets.

Both inked a memorandum of understanding on Nov 5 to collaborate on the Stay Strong programme to bridge the nutrition gap for seniors islandwide.

This comes as a new survey by FairPrice Foundation, the philanthropic arm of FairPrice Group, found that six in 10 seniors do not know what goes into a healthy plate for their nutritional needs.

The Straits Times had reported that malnutrition is a growing problem among seniors in Singapore.

Doctors said this is worrying, given that the city-state is expected to become a super-aged society in 2026, defined internationally as having at least 21 per cent of the population aged 65 or older.

While the programme is still a work in progress, ST understands that it will likely include interactive classroom sessions in senior centres for older adults to learn about the essential nutrients that are important for their well-being.

The sessions will include gamified education, such as bingo-themed matching or guessing games that teach seniors simple ways to eat healthier.

There may also be learning journeys in the supermarket, where seniors can practise evaluating nutrition labels or picking healthier food options.

FairPrice Group's Own Brands and Food Solutions business will also work with TTSH on developing nutritional solutions to help seniors combat dietary deficiencies. This may include protein-rich food such as proteinaceous



From left: Mr Vipul Chawla, group chief executive of FairPrice Group; the group's Own Brands and Food Solutions CEO Grace Chua; Tan Tock Seng Hospital's (TTSH) allied health director Doreen Yeo; and TTSH CEO Tang Kong Choong at the signing of the memorandum of understanding to develop a nutrition education programme for seniors. The programme, which features games, will be rolled out islandwide by end-2026. ST PHOTO: JASON QUAH

drinks to provide seniors with more interesting options to increase their protein intake.

Mr Vipul Chawla, group chief executive of FairPrice Group, said the seniors whom the group and foundation serve show a strong determination to age independently.

"As the nation's largest retailer, we understand the needs of Singapore's growing senior population, and want to do our part in supporting them with achieving this ambition, through proper nutrition," he said.

"This is the foundation of the Stay Strong programme and FairPrice Group – making every day a little better for Singapore's silver population by bringing nutrition access and education to those who need it most."

Adjunct Professor Tang Kong Choong, CEO of TTSH, said: "In the hospital, we can see first-hand how nutrition can make all the difference in helping our patients, especially the seniors, to recover faster and be more independent."

"This partnership with Fair-

Price Foundation will allow us to take our expertise in geriatrics and dietetics beyond the hospital and share it where it matters most – right in the heartland where the seniors are."

He added that by working together, the partners can give seniors practical knowledge and better access to healthier food options they need to stay healthy, active and well.

The new programme was shaped by insights from the Stay Strong study conducted by FairPrice Foundation in the third quarter of 2025 to understand the nutritional challenges faced by seniors.

The study, which consisted of a survey of more than 500 seniors and interviews with seniors and their caregivers, found that while 86 per cent of seniors recognised the need to eat more nutritiously as they age, more than half could not correctly identify what makes up a healthy plate.

My Healthy Plate by the Health Promotion Board (HPB) recommends filling a quarter of the plate

with whole grains, a quarter with meat and other proteins, and half the plate with fruit and vegetables for a balanced diet.

The survey also showed that taste ranked highest in influencing food choices, with nutrition and cost tied as the fourth priority.

While 67 per cent of seniors agree they need more protein than younger adults, HPB data indicated that one in two seniors still falls short of the recommended protein intake, putting them at risk of muscle loss and frailty.

The study also found that six in 10 seniors rarely seek out new information on nutrition, while seven in 10 said family traditions and eating habits were major factors shaping their food choices.

The Stay Strong programme is the senior-focused pillar of FairPrice Foundation's broader Start Strong, Stay Strong vision, which also features Singapore's first preschool nutrition education programme to give children a foundational understanding of food and nutrition.

Its other initiatives include the Neighbourhood Food Share at 60 distribution points by end-2025, providing free fresh fruits and vegetables to residents in need. It also doubled discounts for Chas blue card and orange card holders with large families from September to December 2025.

In March 2025, FairPrice Group and FairPrice Foundation announced their commitment to distribute \$1 million worth of protein in the form of fresh eggs to vulnerable communities, which include seniors and migrant workers, across Singapore by 2030.

A Full Plate, its food donation drive, will reach about 700,000 beneficiaries of 21 community and charity partners in 2025, more than double the number of partners from its launch in 2024. The donation drive will run for two months till Dec 15.

chinsf@sph.com.sg



A study found that 86 per cent of seniors recognised the need to eat more nutritiously as they age, but more than half could not correctly identify what makes up a healthy plate. Health Promotion Board data indicated that one in two seniors still falls short of the recommended protein intake. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

## Pioneering civil servant and diplomat Cheng Tong Fatt dies at 96

Dr Cheng Tong Fatt, a pioneering civil servant and diplomat who served Singapore in a range of portfolios that included food security, urban development and broadcasting, died on Nov 4. He was 96.

Dr Cheng suffered a stroke on Oct 9 and was hospitalised at the National University Hospital. He was transferred to Assisi Hospice about a week ago, where he died peacefully.

He leaves his daughter, son, daughter-in-law and two grandchildren. His wife, Dr Peggy Cheng, died in 2020.

Dr Cheng spent 47 years in the civil service, starting in 1957 as a veterinary officer with the Primary Production Department (PPD) and finally retiring in 2004 as ambassador-at-large with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).

His career spanned vital roles, including serving as Singapore's first ambassador to China from 1991 to 1998. Before this, he was ambassador to Japan from 1988 to 1991, and concurrently to South Korea from 1988 to 1990.



Dr Cheng Tong Fatt was a key architect of Singapore's broadcasting industry.

A veterinarian by training, Dr Cheng obtained his bachelor's in veterinary medicine and surgery from Glasgow University in 1957. He was the director of PPD from 1962 to 1970.

He was transferred to the Ministry of National Development in 1971 and became its permanent secretary from 1972 to 1979. He was also permanent secretary for culture from 1979 to 1985.

He also served as the Urban Redevelopment Authority's acting chairman and later chairman from 1978 to 1981, and was deputy chairman of the Housing Board from 1977 to 1978.

A key architect of Singapore's broadcasting industry, he was general manager and later deputy chairman of the Singapore Broadcasting Corp (SBC), the precursor

to Mediacorp, from 1980 to 1988.

Speaking to The Straits Times, his son, Mr Cheng Jin-Yu, remembers his father as a loving husband, doting father and grandfather as well as a trailblazer and pioneer of Singapore.

"Papa was a man of few words and even fewer emotions. But he always cared for us and made sure that everything would be fine for us," he said.

Mr Cheng said that throughout his father's illustrious career, Dr Cheng had the opportunity to work with many of Singapore's founding leaders, including founding prime minister Lee Kuan Yew, Mr Lim Kim San, Mr Eddie Barker, and past presidents of Singapore.

"During his term with Ministry of National Development, he focused much effort to help implement Singapore's greening efforts and develop our pig and fishery industries," he said.

"I still remember the many weekend visits to the unique-smelling Punggol pig farms when I was a young boy."

His father will always be remembered for his bold vision and contributions to the establishment of the Chinese drama division at SBC, he said.

"I still recall having the privilege of watching the weekly episodes of the popular dramas Army Series, The Awakening, The Samsui Women on VHS tapes prior to them being aired on TV," he said. "I even had the opportunity to vis-

it the studio sets when he made his surprise visits on Saturday nights after dinner."

Dr Cheng was awarded the Public Administration Medal (Gold) in 1963 and the Meritorious Service Medal in 1970.

"He touched the lives of many people and his memory and legacy will continue to live on through the fond memories of his love, achievements and lifelong friendships," Mr Cheng said.

"We will always cherish his many accomplishments and what he has done in service to the nation."

On Nov 5, MFA said in a statement that it was saddened by Dr Cheng's passing. It noted his significant contributions to Singapore's foreign policy, including the role he played in establishing and developing the Suzhou Industrial Park, which remains a cornerstone of Singapore's bilateral cooperation with China.

As ambassador to Japan and South Korea, Dr Cheng helped lay the foundation of the substantive bilateral partnerships Singapore enjoys with the two countries today, MFA said.

Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan said: "He made lasting and crucial contributions to the development of Singapore's diplomatic relations with China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea. We are grateful to Dr Cheng for dedicating many decades of his life to public service."

Chin Soo Fang