

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **TASKFORCE TO LAUNCH GUIDE ON STRENGTHENING THE SOCIAL SERVICE SECTOR BEYOND COVID-19**

**SINGAPORE, 6 MAY 2021** – Recommendations from the Beyond COVID-19 Taskforce were released today in a guide for social service agencies (SSAs) and stakeholders to strengthen the resilience of the social service sector in managing future challenges, titled “Emerging Stronger Together – A Guide Beyond COVID-19”. The Taskforce is a Singapore Together Alliance for Action set up by the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) in May 2020, to support the sector in responding to COVID-19 and propose directions and plans for a stronger social service sector in the longer term.

#### **Impact of COVID-19 on Singaporeans and SSAs**

2. Surveys conducted by NCSS in 2020 revealed that while the quality of life for the general population appeared to be on the recovery in Phase 2 of Singapore’s reopening of the economy, the quality of life for specific groups like seniors and persons with disabilities had not improved since the circuit breaker period. More of them also reported difficulties with living expenses compared to the general population. On the other hand, persons with mental health conditions who remained connected to social services showed improvements in their quality of life, thus demonstrating the importance of seeking help. Nonetheless, majority of Singaporeans, including seniors and persons with disabilities, agreed that they had benefitted from government support schemes during the pandemic. Persons with disabilities and those living in lower-income households were also observed to have better awareness of COVID-19 related assistance schemes in Phase 2, compared to during the circuit breaker period. This could be attributed to targeted outreach efforts to these groups, led by government and community agencies during and after the circuit breaker period. NCSS will be conducting a third wave of the study to continue monitoring trends in the impact of COVID-19 in these groups.

3. The surveys also showed that SSAs faced greatest challenge in the areas of digitalisation, fundraising, managing manpower and volunteers as well as leading their staff through the pandemic. However, despite these challenges, SSAs acknowledged that the experiences with adapting to COVID-19 had led to positive outcomes such as digitalisation and flexible work arrangements, which SSAs were keen to continue even after the pandemic. SSAs could also actively partner with Singaporeans and the community to help those in need, harnessing the tremendous community spirit demonstrated during the pandemic as Singaporeans generously offered their time and resources to volunteer and donate to social causes, especially COVID-19 related causes.

4. “COVID-19 has underscored the importance of strong partnerships that can enable Singapore to address challenges and emerge stronger together. The Beyond COVID-19 Taskforce members have brought diverse and valuable perspectives, which have helped to support the sector in responding and adapting to COVID-19 in the past year, as well as strengthening resilience for the next normal. Together, we will transform capabilities as a sector with SSAs that are driven by committed social service professionals, augmented by volunteers and enabled by technology so that we can better serve the needs of Singaporeans,” said Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Minister for Social and Family Development.

### **Work of the Beyond COVID-19 Taskforce and its recommendations**

5. Chaired by NCSS President Ms Anita Fam, the Beyond COVID-19 Taskforce comprises 21 other members who are representatives from the corporate, public and people sectors. Since its setup, the Taskforce had guided the development and roll-out of various schemes and initiatives to support SSAs in addressing immediate challenges faced during the pandemic. These include the Tech-and-GO! funding to increase the accessibility of digital solutions to support and enhance operations. To date, more than 150 SSAs have benefited from digital solutions and advisory services from Tech-and-GO! and more than 1,000 social service professionals have attended TechUP Friday! webinars to grow awareness in digital tools and knowledge. The Taskforce guided the development of several guides and learning platforms launched in 2020 to share knowledge and good practices in areas such as continuity planning for volunteer management, managing resources and supporting service users. The Taskforce also gathered insights and feedback from SSAs on adapting to the pandemic situation, and proposed ways for SSAs and the sector to build capabilities for the longer term, to emerge stronger from COVID-19.

6. The recommendations from the Taskforce captured in the guide include:

i) Advocating for person-centred services

Ensuring continuity of services and safety of service users and staff was a key priority during the circuit breaker period and reopening phase. Moving forward, the Taskforce recommends applying a person-centred approach to review and design services according to the evolving needs of service users. COVID-19 has highlighted the need to galvanise community resources and involve caregivers, neighbours and volunteers in supporting service users. NCSS launched the Social Innovation Starter Kit in January 2021 to equip SSAs with design thinking tools that can be applied to rethinking service delivery. NCSS will also launch the Empowerment Guide by May 2021 to share knowledge with SSAs on how they can apply the person-centred approach in service delivery.

ii) Advancing digital capabilities within the sector

There is a need to grow awareness and capabilities to leverage technology to enhance operational effectiveness and deliver quality social services. In

addition to the Industry Digital Plan for Social Services that NCSS will launch at the Social Service Summit in July 2021, the Taskforce recommends developing a Digital Maturity Index and Playbook to enable SSAs to assess their own digital readiness and subsequently develop an action plan for their digital agenda. The index also serves as a measurement tool for NCSS to track the progress of digital maturity in the sector, whilst tapping on insights into the sector's digital maturity and best practices to review digitalisation initiatives. Details will be made available by March 2022.

iii) Growing manpower and volunteer management capabilities

The Taskforce highlighted the need to enhance skills and capabilities to build an agile and strong workforce that harnesses opportunities for the next normal, and effectively mobilises volunteers to support the needs of the community. NCSS will continue to support SSAs to address sector-wide gaps in people practices and extend consultancy services with up to 90% co-funding for 20 more SSAs, in addition to the current 90 SSAs on board the programme. This project will be launched by March 2022. In addition, NCSS will roll out a new initiative in June 2021 to co-fund professional services to support the wellbeing of social service professionals, as part of their staff benefits. NCSS will also launch the Learning & Development Roadmap for Volunteer Management Practitioners in July 2021, to strengthen development pathways for practitioners and thus, enhance volunteer management capabilities of SSAs.

iv) Developing resilient organisations and leaders

SSAs will also need leaders who are able to lead them through uncertainties and challenges in the future. The Taskforce recommended building capabilities in crisis management and growing grounds-up alliances among SSA leaders to drive collective learning, pilot solutions and strengthen the leadership in the entire sector. The Social Service Institute (SSI), the training arm of NCSS, will be developing a crisis management playbook for the sector, to be ready by end 2021. It will also offer contextualised leadership training programmes to develop core competencies in areas such as crisis management, change management and strategic and operational agility. Working in partnership with various Institutes of Higher Learning, SSI hopes to roll out these programmes progressively in 2022.

7. “We hope that the recommendations in the guide will be useful for SSAs in taking the next step to building capabilities in the immediate term. There is more that the sector needs to work on together, and we encourage stakeholders to work with NCSS and SSAs to further develop plans and initiatives to strengthen the sector in the longer term. We believe the social service sector will emerge stronger together when we stay united in the vision to create a caring and inclusive society where every person is empowered to live with dignity,” said Ms Anita Fam, President of NCSS.

8. The full guide can be found on NCSS' website via <https://go.gov.sg/bc19ffguide>.

### **Forward plans to strengthen the social service sector and the refresh of the Social Service Sector Strategic Thrusts**

9. NCSS invites stakeholders to partner with NCSS and SSAs to support the development of the recommended capability areas identified by the Taskforce, through sharing of expertise, networks and resources. Funders and the community are welcome to support SSAs in their capability and capacity-building projects, by giving to the Community Capability Trust (CCT) through Community Chest. With support from the Tote Board and the government to encourage community giving, each dollar donated to Community Chest for the CCT between Financial Year 2021 to Financial Year 2025 will be matched with two dollars; and each dollar donated for the subsequent five years will be matched dollar-for-dollar. SSAs may apply for the CCT from April 2022 onwards to support projects that will strengthen organisational capabilities, enhance infrastructure, improve productivity and optimise manpower to strengthen resilience after COVID-19 and into the next normal. The CCT will help grow resources to support the development of the sector and provide a longer-term source of funding to alleviate concerns on resourcing and financial sustainability.

10. NCSS has also started engaging the social service sector and stakeholders in discussions to refresh the Social Service Sector Strategic Thrusts (4ST) to guide the sector's development in the next five years. The new five-year roadmap is expected to be launched in 2022. Those interested to participate in the discussions can reach out to NCSS via [planning@ncss.gov.sg](mailto:planning@ncss.gov.sg).

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### **National Council of Social Service (NCSS)**

NCSS is the umbrella body for over 450-member social service organisations in Singapore. Its mission is to provide leadership and direction in enhancing the capabilities and capacity of our members, advocating for social service needs and strengthening strategic partnerships, for an effective social service ecosystem. Community Chest is the fundraising and engagement arm of NCSS and Social Service Institute (SSI) is the human capital development arm of NCSS.