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Home caregivers to get more financial help from next month



Senior Minister of State for Health Edwin Tong joining in a painting session at St Luke's ElderCare in Pandan Gardens yesterday. Besides financial help, caregivers now have access to the Go Respite pilot, which cuts waiting time for senior care centres like St Luke's ElderCare, and nursing homes. ST PHOTO: TIMOTHY DAVID

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Home caregivers will enjoy more financial relief from next month when the \$200 Home Caregiving Grant takes effect, replacing the \$120 Foreign Domestic Worker (FDW) Grant.

They will also benefit from a shorter waiting period for respite care since a pre-enrolment pilot by the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) began in April.

Senior Minister of State for Health Edwin Tong yesterday outlined these initiatives, which were first announced as part of the Caregiver Support Action Plan unveiled by the Ministry of Health (MOH) during February's Budget debate.

Mr Tong was speaking on the sidelines of a visit to St Luke's ElderCare in Pandan Gardens.

The Home Caregiving Grant, which goes into effect on Oct 1, will be a monthly cash payout that gives recipients the flexibility to defray caregiving expenses, including for hiring a maid, as well as home and community-based services.

Those who are already receiving the FDW Grant will be automatically enrolled into the Home Caregiving Grant, while new applicants can start applying from Oct 1.

The grant will be paid to eligible recipients, who can also choose to nominate a caregiver to receive it.

Recipients must meet certain criteria to qualify for the grant. They need to:

- Always require some assistance with at least three activities of daily living.
- Have been means-tested to have a per capita household monthly income that is \$2,800 or less, or belong to a household with no income and be living in a residence with an annual value that is \$13,000 or less.
- Be a Singaporean, or a permanent resident with a parent, child or spouse who is a Singaporean.
- They also must not be living in a residential long-term care institution like a nursing home.

Mr Tong acknowledged that people may abuse the cash payout, and MOH is looking at measures to prevent this.

"We have surveyed the landscape enough to build in some safeguards. We also want to give flexibility... and so we have to trust that caregivers will not abuse it," he added.

Mr Lim Chin Hwee, who takes care of his 88-year-old mother with dementia, welcomed the additional support, but thinks it is still not enough.

"It will lessen the financial burden slightly," said the 57-year-old taxi driver, whose mother's expenses are around \$600 a month.

Mr Lim and his wife, a shop employee, as well as their son, who works in the IT industry, support the entire family, including three other children.

His mother currently receives help from the Pioneer Generation Disability Assistance Scheme and the Interim Disability Assistance Programme for the Elderly, amounting to \$350 a month.

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But her recent hospitalisation at Changi General Hospital last month after she had a fall set them back by \$3,000, and they paid another \$300 to buy assistive devices like a wheelchair.

Besides the financial help, caregivers now also have access to the Go Respite pilot. It cuts down the waiting time of four weeks to an average of one week for senior care centres and two weeks for nursing homes.

Close to 150 people have applied for the pilot and over 10 per cent of them have used the respite care services, which are offered by 20 senior care centres and 26 nursing homes currently on board.

MOH hopes that at least 500 people will apply by the middle of next year, said Mr Tong.

MOH will also expand AIC Link counters beyond the current eight locations to give caregivers and seniors better access to information and referrals. AIC Link@Toa Payoh just started operations this month, and three more AIC Links in Choa Chu Kang, Nee Soon and Pasir Ris will open by the end of the year.

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