



# Obesity, poor mental health of concern; progress in other areas: S'pore health survey

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Residents in Singapore are generally getting healthier and more health-conscious, with the prevalence of some major ailments dipping or stabilising, and screening

rates and physical activity levels bouncing back from the Covid-19 pandemic health slump.

Obesity rates and poor mental health, however, "demand urgent and collective attention", said Health Minister Ong Ye Kung on Oct 17. This is especially so when it comes to younger adults.

According to the latest National

Population Health Survey (NPHS), obesity rates have risen to 12.7 per cent in 2023-2024, up from 10.5 per cent four years earlier. Worse, the rate has almost doubled among those aged 18 to 29, from 6.6 per cent to 11.6 per cent over the same period. "This is a worrying sign of how modern lifestyles – busier, more sedentary, and digitally driven – are heightening health risks," said Mr Ong, speaking at the SingHealth Polyclinics' (SHP) 25th anniversary dinner, where he shared the latest survey results.

Moreover, about 15 per cent of residents report poor mental health. Among those aged 18 to 29 the proportion is higher, at about one in four – the highest among all

age groups.

The 2024 NPHS reports on the health, risk factors and lifestyle practices of Singapore residents aged between 18 and 74 years old, tracked through household interviews from July 2023 to June 2024. It also looks at obesity and chronic disease prevalence measured as part of health examinations from July 2022 to August 2024.

To tackle obesity and its accompanying health problems, and help more people prevent chronic conditions such as diabetes and hypertension, the Ministry of Health (MOH) has implemented various measures, including the Nutri-

Grade labelling requirements on pre-packaged and freshly prepared beverages, spurring the development of healthier options.

MOH will extend these requirements to key contributors of sodium and saturated fat, including pre-packed salt, sauces, seasonings, instant noodles and cooking oil, from mid-2027.

When it comes to mental health support services, the Government has been strengthening efforts, including launching the national mindline 1771 in June, which provides round-the-clock mental

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Speaking at the SingHealth Polyclinics' 25th anniversary dinner at D'Marquee in Downtown East on Oct 17, Health Minister Ong Ye Kung said that with the prevalence of hypertension remaining relatively stable, and a sharp decline in hyperlipidaemia, this will hopefully lead to fewer strokes and cardiac arrests over time. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

The National Population Health Survey reports on the health, risk factors and lifestyle practices of Singapore residents aged between 18 and 74 years old, and based on the latest results, this group is adopting healthier lifestyles. ST PHOTO: BRIAN TEO



# S'pore residents' total physical activity, health screening rates rising

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health support through phone calls, texts and online chats.

While more people are struggling with stress, anxiety and isolation, the proportion of those willing to seek help has increased.

For those who were willing to turn to informal support networks, the proportion has increased significantly, from 78.4 per cent in 2023 to 81.8 per cent in 2024, said MOH.

Based on the latest results, Singapore residents are adopting healthier lifestyles, with total physical activity and health screening rates rising and returning to pre-pandemic levels.

For instance, chronic disease screening rates dipped from 66.3 per cent in 2019 to 62.6 per cent in 2023, although this has gone up to 66.4 per cent in 2024, according to the latest survey.

Over the past five years, the prevalence of hypertension and diabetes has remained relatively stable, while that of hyperlipidaemia, referring to high blood cholesterol levels, saw a sharp decline from 39.1 per cent to 30.5 per cent.

"We hope that over time, this can translate into fewer strokes and cardiac arrests that we experience every day," said Mr Ong, who is also Coordinating Minister for Social Policies. Hypertension and hyperlipidaemia are both significant contributors to heart disease and stroke.

The prevalence of daily smoking continued its downward trend from 10.6 per cent in 2019 to 8.4 per cent in 2023, and has now reached a record low of 8.4 per cent.

More people are getting vaccinated against common diseases too, with a significant improvement in influenza and pneumococcal vaccination rates, from 21.7 per

cent in 2023 to 28.2 per cent in 2024, and 35 per cent in 2023 to 49.7 per cent in 2024, respectively.

Describing these as "meaningful gains", Mr Ong emphasised that strengthening primary care to work with the community and building up population health – the central thrust of the healthcare strategy – is a very long-term effort. "It is not a sprint and there are no immediate results. It is more like running a marathon; in fact, multiple marathons," said Mr Ong, adding that persevering on this path hopefully will bring about the avoidance or delay of debilitating diseases which build up through an accumulation of bad lifestyle choices.

The latest NPHS results show that "Singapore's steadfast approach to tackle health risk factors has yielded positive results", including early signs of positive results from the population health strategy of Healthier SG, said Professor Teo Yik Ying, dean of NUS' Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health.

Nevertheless, "this is a long-drawn battle, and we cannot afford

to be complacent", said Prof Teo, who noted that as a country with a high penetration rate of technology and a well-travelled populace, people in Singapore are constantly exposed to new harms and addictions such as vapes, social media addiction, vaccine misinformation and ultra-processed foods.

On obesity, he highlighted the need to understand the drivers of the disease, noting that physical activity levels have increased. Past surveys, though, have also shown an upward trend in total caloric intake, as well as protein and fats intake, which will certainly impact on the population's weight gain and obesity levels.

"So while there are encouraging signs that our population health strategies and policies are working, we need to continue to identify where we can do better," said Prof Teo.

At the dinner held at D'Marquee in Downtown East, SHP announced that it will establish its first Telehealth Hub in Eunos Polyclinic in the first half of 2026.

In the first year of operation, more than 58,000 patients are expected to benefit by having to make fewer physical visits to the polyclinics for follow-up checks or consultations. They can be seen by doctors, nurses, pharmacists and allied health professionals without leaving home.

Ten pods will be set up in Eunos Polyclinic for healthcare staff from all 10 SHP polyclinics to provide virtual care services, Dr Gary Kang, director for SHP's regional clinical services in the east, told The Straits Times that this will free up clinic space at all polyclinics for patients who require in-person care while SHP expands virtual care capacity.

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## Population health results at a glance

### WHAT HAS IMPROVED

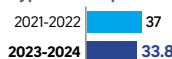
#### Sufficient total physical activity (%)



#### Daily smoking prevalence (%)



#### Hypertension prevalence (%)



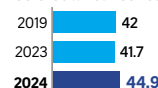
#### Hyperlipidaemia prevalence (%)



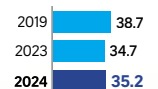
#### Chronic disease screening (%)



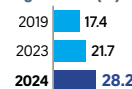
#### Colorectal cancer screening (%)



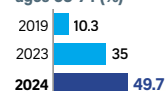
#### Breast cancer screening (%)



#### Influenza vaccination rate, ages 18-74 (%)



#### Pneumococcal vaccination uptake rate, ages 65-74 (%)



### AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

#### Obesity rate (%)



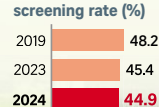
#### Prevalence of poor mental health (%)



#### Diabetes prevalence (%)



#### Cervical cancer screening rate (%)



### NO QUICK FIX

**It is not a sprint and there are no immediate results. It is more like running a marathon; in fact, multiple marathons.**



**HEALTH MINISTER ONG YE KUNG**, emphasising that strengthening primary care to work with the community and building up population health is a long-term strategy.



Source: MINISTRY OF HEALTH'S NATIONAL POPULATION HEALTH SURVEY 2024 ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS