

**STATEMENT BY JOHN LIM, SECOND DEPUTY SECRETARY FOR MINISTRY OF  
SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE,  
13<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF STATES PARTIES TO THE  
CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, 30 NOV, 1  
DEC AND 3 DEC 2020**

1 Singapore is committed to building an inclusive society, where persons with disabilities are empowered and given every opportunity to participate as integral and contributing members of society.

2 Singapore's disability policies and initiatives are guided by our national roadmap, the five-year Enabling Masterplans. Together with our community partners, we have made significant progress in the areas of early detection and intervention, education, training and employment, transportation and the use of assistive technology. We are now into the third edition of our Enabling Masterplan.

Supporting persons with disabilities through the COVID-19 pandemic

3 The COVID-19 pandemic which spread across the globe in 2020 has been a human crisis of unprecedented scale. The pandemic has seriously affected the health and disrupted the livelihoods and wellbeing of people around the world. Many persons with disabilities have been disproportionately affected.

4 Singapore believes firmly that the needs of persons with disabilities must be seen to in our pandemic response. In this regard, we welcomed the publication of the UN Secretary-General's policy brief on "A disability inclusive response to COVID-19" in May 2020, in response to which Singapore co-initiated a Joint Statement in support of the policy brief endorsed by 146 member states. We also welcomed the initiatives by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility, and the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities. It is through the combined efforts of governments, the UN system and stakeholders, including persons with

disabilities, that the interests of persons with disabilities all over the world can be truly safeguarded and promoted in the face of such a crisis.

5 My delegation would like to share some of the measures Singapore has taken to ensure a disability-inclusive response to the COVID-19 pandemic. To slow local transmission of COVID-19, Singapore entered a two-month “Circuit Breaker” period of enhanced safe distancing measures in April 2020. Schools and physical workplace premises were closed. Many services usually provided face-to-face had to be offered remotely, and our disability service providers innovated in order to continue supporting clients.<sup>1</sup> To address increased telecommunication needs, we provided grants to social service agencies to buy hardware and software.<sup>2</sup> We also set up a new fund, **The Invictus Fund**, to channel private donations to those delivering critical services to vulnerable groups, to help them maintain operations during this period.

6 The Singapore Government worked with various partners to ensure that food and essential items reached persons with disabilities who required such assistance, such as those with mobility issues, or insufficient family support. For persons with disabilities who had to be quarantined, the government made arrangements for volunteers to stay with those living alone. A one-time cash relief payment was also provided to approximately 800 households with more than one person with disabilities.

7 Beyond the immediate health crisis, the pandemic has impacted the livelihoods of many, including persons with disabilities. Singapore formed the **National Jobs Council** recently to identify and develop job opportunities and skills training for Singaporeans amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, including a dedicated workstream to support persons with disabilities. Under the new **Jobs Growth Incentive** scheme, the Government will provide wage support of 50% to all new

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<sup>1</sup> Several of these providers, community groups and volunteers also hosted regular online activities to engage persons with disabilities, and to raise awareness on the measures to fight COVID-19.

<sup>2</sup> Self-help guides and telephone helpdesk support were also provided to support the transition.

hires<sup>3</sup> of local persons with disabilities. The new **Enabling Employment Credit (EEC)** will replace existing wage offsets expiring in December 2020, for employers of Singaporeans with disabilities. The EEC will provide such employers with a wage offset of up to 20% of the employee's monthly income. Additional wage offsets of up to 10% for six months will apply for long-term unemployed persons with disabilities. Jobseekers with disabilities and employers can also continue to tap on the **Open Door Programme (ODP)**, which provides support for job placement, training and cost of job redesign. The ODP Training Grant was enhanced in July 2020 to encourage more employers to support training for their employees with disabilities.

### Working together through consultations and meaningful participation

8 The Government has been actively engaging disability stakeholders, including persons with disabilities, to understand challenges arising from COVID-19 that different groups of persons with disabilities face. For example, Singapore has embarked on a series of Singapore Together Emerging Stronger Conversations (ESC) to hear Singaporeans' reflections on their COVID-19 experiences and their ideas and aspirations for Singapore's future during and beyond COVID-19. Three sessions were conducted specifically with the disability community, including persons with disabilities, family members of persons with disabilities, and staff from disability service providers. Their views and ideas are being used to enhance disability policy and programmes, so that we can emerge from this crisis as a stronger, more inclusive and more resilient society.

9 The Government also works with community partners to co-create solutions, including through SG Enable, our key partner in the administering of disability services. SG Enable connected with innovators to produce prototypes of see-through masks that allow deaf and hard-of-hearing students to read the lips and facial cues of their teachers.<sup>4</sup> As another example, the government developed a guide to help enforcement officers and frontline agencies identify and support persons with

<sup>3</sup> This applies from September 2020 to February 2021 to new hires of local persons with disabilities by firms that increase their local headcount.

<sup>4</sup> Pictures of the see-through masks are available at <https://www.facebook.com/MSFSingapore/posts/3416252455074515> and <https://www.independentmarket.sg/products/transparent-face-mask>.

disabilities and special needs. The guide has been shared with large supermarket chains and is available publicly to help raise awareness amongst the general public.

### Progress under the Third Enabling Masterplan

10 Notwithstanding the pandemic, Singapore has continued to press on with our Third Enabling Masterplan. Major developments in this year include the following:

- a. In healthcare, Singapore introduced **CareShield Life** in August 2020. This is a national long-term care insurance scheme, to provide lifelong cash pay-outs for those with severe disabilities.
- b. To support families of students with disabilities, we have increased existing funding and subsidy support by 70%, for those<sup>5</sup> who attend after-school care services at Special Student Care Centres (SSCCs). With these changes, **out-of-pocket expenses for SSCC services will be lowered** for most income groups, with reductions averaging between 30% and 80%.
- c. To encourage businesses to be more inclusive in hiring employees with disabilities, the government introduced in October 2020 a national-level accreditation framework, called the **Enabling Mark**, to benchmark and recognise disability-inclusive employers.

11 The Singapore delegation will share more about our efforts to support the employment of persons with disabilities at Roundtable 1 on Disability and Business on 1 December 2020.

12 In conclusion, Singapore believes strongly that a concerted and coherent disability-inclusive COVID-19 response and recovery plan will better serve the whole of society. COVID-19 is certainly a crisis on multiple levels, but we also see it as an opportunity. For if we respond well as a society, we not only ensure that no one with

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<sup>5</sup> Special Student Care Centres (SSCCs) provide after-school care services and supervision for students aged 7–18 years old attending Special Education schools (SPED schools).

or without disabilities is left behind; we also knit the fabric of a kinder, more inclusive and ultimately stronger society for all.

13 We look forward to learning more from our fellow participants at this Conference. Thank you.

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