

## Transcript of Closing Remarks by Minister for Communications and Information Mrs Josephine at the Forward SG Engagement on Digital Inclusion “Building Seniors’ Confidence in Digital” on Friday, 17 February 2023

### Introduction

1 Thank you for making time and for spending your afternoon with us. This set of conversations has been organised as part of the Forward Singapore (Forward SG) movement. This movement has to do with the idea that while we may be maturing as a society - and in many regards, are successful as a country - we have to always challenge ourselves by laying out the path towards a brighter future for ourselves and for our future generations.

2 The idea of Forward SG really has to do with the social compact. To me, the social compact is about **what each one of us needs to contribute to the broader society. At the same time, it is about what each one of us can expect in the form of support from society so that we can be our best selves.**

3 We had another session two weeks ago, where we were interested in the support for a different profile<sup>1</sup> – persons from disadvantaged backgrounds and how we can help them as part of our nation’s digital development. Today, we are focusing on seniors and how to help them build confidence.

4 At the previous session, **I shared how my international counterparts are impressed by some of the progress that Singapore has achieved in digitalisation.** For example, our household Internet access is at 99%, and 92% of households have computer access. For some of my colleagues from other parts of the world, they are still trying their best to get thousands of villages connected. Yet, the point we must keep in mind is that **just because we have digital access does not mean that we have digital inclusion.** You can be connected but if you don't have a level of proficiency, you cannot participate or your participation will be shallow. Keeping that in mind, **our efforts at digital inclusion must be thoughtful, and they must be very much a part of our DNA.** It is not something that is a nice to have. It has to be core to everything that we do in promoting digital developments.

### Digital Social Compact

5 Digital inclusion is a key part of us moving forward together as a nation and strengthening our social compact. There is a digital dimension to the social compact that we seek to strengthen in Singapore – a digital social compact that we are seeking and working hard to build.

6 In today's session, we are particularly focusing on building confidence amongst our seniors so that they can navigate the digital domain securely and successfully. There was very rich conversation. A participant pointed out something that is very useful, which is that we have to start with seniors’ frame of mind first – start with where they are.

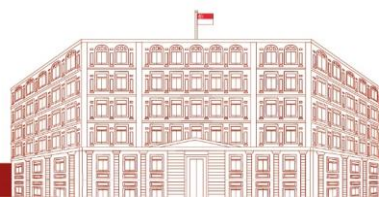
7 Today I'm going to share a set of research findings<sup>2</sup> that we have just assembled. We have not published these findings, but I think they help us understand the issues and have the right level of ambition as well as the right level of optimism.

8 We start with how people feel about digital technologies making their lives easier. We asked the general population and the level of agreement for this group is very high – 84%. Then

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<sup>1</sup> Engagement session on “Enhancing Digital Access for Low-income Households” held on 3 February

<sup>2</sup> The Digital Readiness Survey 2022 was conducted by the Ministry of Communications and Information with a random sample of over 2,000 Singapore citizens aged 15 years and above.



we asked people of different age groups. When we look at the data and we break it down further, it is quite interesting, but also not totally surprising.

- a. 70% of seniors in their 60s agreed with this statement.
- b. For seniors aged 70 and above, 62% of them agreed with the statement.
- c. So, this set of data suggests that **even among seniors aged 70 years old and above, a majority of them agree that digital technologies make their lives easier.**

9 For the next set of data, we asked if they are keen to try out new digital technologies. Here, there is also something interesting. Even though the earlier set of data suggests that digital technologies have made life easier, it does not mean that they want more of it.

- a. This is true of the general population. While 84% agreed that digital technologies made their lives easier, only 65% were keen to try out new digital technologies.
- b. Similarly, smaller numbers for seniors in the 60s and seniors in their 70s<sup>3</sup>. So, majority believe that digital technologies would make their lives better, but in the senior years, usually less than half would want to try more.

10 We also asked questions to ascertain people's digital proficiency. Essentially, we asked people whether they know how to perform a particular task. Some could only perform a few tasks and would be categorised as having low proficiency. If they can get to six basic tasks<sup>4</sup>, then we say that they have developing proficiency. If they can do 13 basic tasks<sup>5</sup>, that will be termed 'basic proficiency'. To exceed basic proficiency, one must be able to do all 30 tasks.

11 What do the results say? Let me explain how to read this set of data.

- a. For the general population – about 59% had basic or higher than basic proficiency in 2020, and by 2022, it went to 68%. We asked people about the same tasks.
- b. For those with developing proficiency, about 17% still in 2020 and 2022.
- c. For those with low proficiency – meaning those that can only do a few tasks – that has gone down from 24% to 15%.
- d. So for the general population, what you can keep in mind is that in terms of basic or higher proficiency 68% are quite adept and digitally proficient. That's not bad for the whole population.

12 Now then, what about seniors in their 60s? The most interesting thing to me is that basic or higher proficiency among seniors in their 60s is at 44% today. But it is the direction of change that I feel most optimistic about. Just two years ago, it was 28% - meaning that those with basic or higher proficiency went up by 16 percentage points. That is very significant. For those with low proficiency, it also went down by the same share – by 16 percentage points.

13 What about seniors in their 70s and above? For those with basic or higher proficiency – 17% in 2022, which is still higher than two years ago, but the improvement is not so big<sup>6</sup>. The

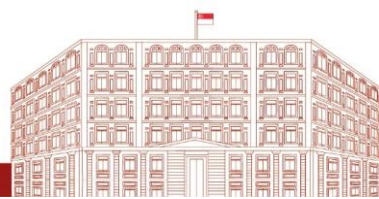
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<sup>3</sup> 49% of seniors in their 60s agreed that they were keen to try out new digital technologies, while 41% of seniors aged 70 and above agreed with this statement. This is in contrast with 70% of seniors in their 60s and 62% of seniors aged 70 and above who agreed that digital technologies have made their lives easier

<sup>4</sup> These include browsing/reading content on social media; searching for information on a topic online; and using instant messaging

<sup>5</sup> These include accessing Government services using SingPass; buying products/services online; using smartphones to make contactless payments; setting a strong password for online accounts; and enabling 2FA

<sup>6</sup> In 2020, about 14% of seniors aged 70 and above had basic or higher proficiency.



biggest improvement for seniors in their 70s is from low to developing proficiency<sup>7</sup>, meaning that they did make an improvement but a more modest one. But the direction and development is still a good one. Those with low proficiency is now down to about half (54%). So in time to come, it could go down even further. **They may not be as proficient as the general population, but the direction of change is very encouraging.**

14 What are the areas where they seem to be having more challenges? We picked up a few.

15 Use of smartphone for contactless payment came up. Amongst the general population only 18% say they did not know how to do so. For seniors in their 60s, 34%. Among seniors aged 70 and above, about 60% said they did not know how to use a contactless payment. This is something that we can keep in mind. That's where a practical gap could be plugged.

16 If we look at another important area – we are always concerned about our parents being scammed by fake news. To mitigate this, we must cross check news and information. Amongst the general population, most people know how to do it. Only about one in five (22%) said they did not know how to do it. For seniors in their 60s, as well as those aged 70 and above – it is more significant<sup>8</sup>. So that is probably another area of intervention that we could devote some attention to.

### Digital First but not Digital Only

17 What next? For us working in MCI, together with IMDA and all our colleagues in Smart Nation, I think I would summarise two key takeaways for us.

18 In many ways, we want to be digital first because of the innovation potential, as well as the productivity angle. But I think we have to accept that the right and proper thing to do is not to be digital only. Because insisting on being digital only will exclude a lot of people. **If we want to move forward as one nation, we would have to consider the approach of being “digital first, but not digital only”.** That may be a more tenable position and kinder position for society to take.

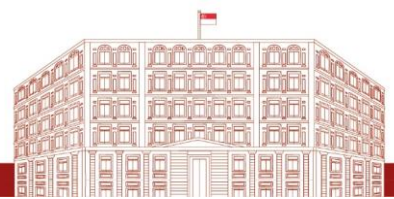
- a. We want to encourage going digital but not to make it so harsh, with no options.
- b. It does not mean that all services continue to be able to have a non-digital option. But overall, a person should still be able to function, with essential services still available to him or her. That's why for CDC vouchers, most of the redemption is through digital means, but there is still a non-digital option. This may be with us for some time.
- c. The Government also sets up service centres to enable our citizens to come and seek face to face assistance.

19 **Another very important takeaway – how is it that the seniors even in their 60s and 70s were able to make such good progress in the two years?** A lot of credit has to go to organisations like yourselves – RSVP Singapore, Lions Befrienders, SG Assist and many others – for chipping in and working together with our SG Digital Office. All of you are part of the Digital for Life movement, all contributing in our own ways.

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<sup>7</sup> About 29% of seniors in their 70s and above had developing proficiency in 2022, compared to 7% in 2020. Meanwhile, about 54% of seniors in their 70s and above had low proficiency in 2022, compared to 80% in 2020.

<sup>8</sup> About 45% of seniors in their 60s and 62% of seniors aged 70 and above said they did not know how to do so.



20 In Singapore, individuals use their time and energy to make things better – they volunteer and try to be part of the solution. It is impossible to help seniors be more confident in the digital age without such partnerships. We all need to work together.

### Takeaways from engagement session

21 If you allow me just a few more minutes just to summarise some of the key takeaways I had listening to your conversations. What does it take for us to help our seniors gain confidence? I would say that there are two or three things.

22 One is that we cannot run away from skills. A group talked about fear – that seniors are fearful. **Part of the reason for this fear is that they do not have the relevant skills to help them feel confident about going digital. Your contributions are that you help people to learn skills.** You also help them appreciate the benefits and, as pointed out by a group here today, the costs of not learning digital skills. Another table pointed out that it is important to teach seniors practical skills. In addition, bite-sized training and peers can play a big part, as peers would more likely have the empathy and understanding of the kinds of things that we want.

23 The second is in terms of how the **design of the services can be much more sensitive to seniors.** For example, sometimes, less is more. One of the participants said: “Don't cram the app with so many things.” Customise it to their needs – including areas like font size, language, voice. Those are the things that could be done. There's still a lot of room for improvement at the design level and this is something that we can be mindful of – both within the government in terms of the delivery of digital services, as well as outside of the government, in the people- and private-sectors.

24 There is one final point that came out, which is that if we really want to help seniors grow in confidence, we should start by reminding them that they have dealt with technology before – this was pointed out by one of our participants here today. They are not totally alien to technology. They can start from some level of confidence because they had done some of this before. They learned to operate the washing machine and the microwave. They learned to use the pager. Bit by bit, they grow their skills, and so it is not something that is totally out of their reach.

25 **When you meet them where they are, help them with design, help them with skills, then gradually they will get the hang of it.** With the support of the community. I think they can become even more proficient and confident.

### Conclusion

26 My colleagues and I feel very privileged to have had this opportunity to get your insights. This is not the end. We have some other sessions planned, focusing on different segments of the population that have told us that they would like more support. For example, in the next phase, we want to help parents with children who are digital natives.

27 We hope that by working together, we can truly strengthen this digital social compact. We should become a nation that brings everyone along as we move towards the digital future. **This includes seniors, whether they are in their 60s, or in their 70s – they are part of this digital future and part of this community.** And I think we can do it.

28 Thank you.

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