

# Singapore and Denmark exchange ideas for an ageing population

By Rachel Lim

The world is undergoing a demographical shift towards lower birth rates and longer life spans. By 2050, the world's population aged 60 years and older is estimated to reach 2 billion, up from 900 million in 2015. Many countries are already beginning to face the impact and challenges of a ballooning ageing population, and Singapore is no different. According to the 3rd Asia Pacific Silver Economy Business Opportunities Report 2015, Singapore is one of the three countries with the longest life expectancy in the Asia Pacific region, after Japan and Hong Kong, and also one of the countries with the longest healthy life expectancy, at 73 years.

Singapore and Denmark share similarities in facing a rapidly ageing population. In less than 15 years, one out of every four persons in both countries will be aged above 65. Both countries have already begun to rethink active ageing by investing in social innovation models and technologies that enable the elderly to stay independent in their own homes and maintain a good quality of life.

However, while Singapore is still on a look out for strategies to help seniors and tackle the problems of a rapidly ageing population, Denmark's efforts are already underway to equip the elderly with skills to enable them to age independently at home.

There are several areas which Singapore can tap on the Danish success, from the social aspect of care for the elderly to rehabilitation and home care for the elderly.

In Denmark, facilities and services in the cities are being redesigned to cater to the demographic shift, by changing the focus from looking at ageing as a nursing concept, to empowering elderly citizens to live dignified lives in inclusive societies.

Eldercare solutions are co-created by public and private stakeholders in Denmark, where private firms involve the public sector and the elderly to test concepts and solution, and receiving their feedback after. This is one significant aspect of the Danish healthcare model. Examples of collaboration include innovative housing projects such as the Nursing Home of the Future in Aalborg, and the development of assistive technologies in Living Laboratories found in across municipalities in Denmark.

The Aalborg Municipal, located in the north of Denmark, recognises the importance of innovation and technological interventions in view of the ageing population and decreasing workforce. Having created a "Nursing Home of the Future model", known as Fremtidens Plejehjem in Danish, where technology and unique collaboration between different professions will ensure better welfare and well-being for the residents. By providing the whole suites of services under one roof makes this model in Aalborg different from the rest of the world.

Termed as "welfare technology," the Aalborg Municipal aims to reduce the workload of the care staff to allow better interaction between staff and the residents. Fremtidens Plejehjem encourages residents to be independent, living by the mindset of, "I want to manage things myself... if I am able to," and the concept of the facility includes stimulation of the senses, mobility, and inclusion.

"We provide a public restaurant, bringing society in instead of keeping society out, that is actually been the goal of everyone. The older people actually want to participate in activities, it helps to slow down the decline of the brain's mentality. Being aware of that, we want to introduce social and physical activities. Instead of bringing the services to our residents, we would like our residents to come to the services", shares Mr Thomas Krarup, Alderman and Member of City Council Aalborg Municipality, Denmark.

“ My vision for the ageing baby boomers is to keep active, keep smiling and also keep social, because that is what it really impacts! ”



Mr Thomas Krarup,  
Alderman and Member of  
City Council Aalborg  
Municipality, Denmark

For the future ageing baby boomers, Thomas envisions them to keep active, keep smiling and also keep social, because that is what it really impacts. He says, "There are plenty who are restricted by wheelchairs but have great quality of life because they do not let their disabilities hinder them from doing what they like. Everyone of us will face some form of disability as we age, but although one may not be able to go running anymore, you can do everything else".

He added that, despite having different perspectives, Singapore and Denmark are struggling towards the same goal. "When I look at Singapore, the situation that you have here in Singapore is growing very fast, one that Denmark has taken 50 years to get to. Maybe Singapore can leap over, learn from the mistakes Denmark had made and with that, I think we might be able to introduce some solutions that might be useful for all." ■■