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Duke-NUS holds conference on ageing and healthcare

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With Asia on track to having the world's oldest population in the next few decades, the conference facilitated dialogue among policymakers and researchers on enabling a healthy ageing society.



Robust dialogues towards more evidence-based population ageing policies for a healthy ageing society on 4-6 Sep 2019, featured the first conference organised by Duke-NUS Medical School's Centre for Ageing Research and Education (CARE) and supported by the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA). The conference gathered policymakers and researchers from Southeast Asia, South Asia, China, Japan and South Korea. They shared insights on data and national policies with regards to ageing and the health of the respective countries, as well as regional initiatives on ageing.

"The first step towards advancing regional cooperation on ageing related challenges in Southeast Asia is to understand the current health status of older adults with evidence-based facts, to make sound and sustainable plans for achieving active ageing in the future. This conference aims to provide opportunities for better dialogue among policymakers and researchers on population ageing, so that national and regional policies and planning on healthy and active ageing can be guided by evidence," said Dr Angelique Chan, Executive Director of CARE and an Associate Professor with Duke-NUS' Health Services and Systems Research Programme.

Statistics show that the proportion of individuals aged 60 and above in Singapore and South Korea will exceed that of Japan's by 2065. Thailand and China will be just behind these countries, with Brunei, Vietnam and Malaysia not too far behind. The same demographic in Lao PDR, Myanmar, Indonesia and Cambodia is also projected to exceed Japan's by 20 per cent by 2065. Although the projected proportion of older adults in the Philippines is lower than that of all the other countries, the sheer number of older adults there, which amounts to more than 30 million, warrants attention.

Given these projections, it is important that issues around population ageing are addressed not just at the country level but also at the regional level. Regional initiatives on ageing were presented at the conference by international agencies, including the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), ERIA, the ASEAN Research Network on Ageing, and HelpAge International. The agencies also discussed the World Health Organization's new International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) concept, which promotes active ageing and integrated care. Longitudinal survey data and research results based on this would reveal the priority areas for policy making on ageing and health for ASEAN as well as countries in the wider Asian region.

“ERIA, as a think tank mandated to make policy recommendations for ASEAN member states, feels it is time to bridge academics with policymakers. This workshop is designed to facilitate the dialogue between them and the utilisation of scientific data for policy making. It is also expected that this workshop will provide a good opportunity for academics to understand what policymakers need for their activities,” said Dr Ozuke Komazawa, Special Advisor to the Health Care and Long Term Care Policy Unit, ERIA.

“This conference organised by CARE is an ideal platform for the interaction between policymakers and researchers across Southeast Asia and other countries. Discussions such as these can help enormously in the development of evidence-based policies that address the needs of older adults,” said Professor Patrick Casey, Senior Vice Dean for Research at DukeNUS.